ONE-ACT PLAYS

FAIZ

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Selected by

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Lahore

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CAXTON BOOK HOUSE

LAHORE

Price 3/8/-

Published by R. H. D. Khalid and Printed at the Sumbeen Art Press, by Kh, Ghulam Mohammad 41, Chamberlain Road, LAHORE.

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INTRODUCTION

The One-Act play has won recognition as a specific dramatic type. It is no longer an embryo and an experiment. Theatre managers, the general theatre-going public, actors, playwrights and even professors, recognise its presence. The One-Act play can no longer be dismissed, with a lofty wave of the academic hand, as of no consequence. It is with us; and it warrants being taken seriously. No apology is therefore being offered for still another selection of contemporary One-Act plays. They justify themselves as worth while studies of human life and character. It must be pointed out however that the One-Act play is not altogether an invention of the twentieth century. Short farcical plays appear to have developed independently in ancient Greece and ancient Italy. Similarly short farces flourished in Italy from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, as the *Commedia dill' arte* and in other European countries. The earliest

English 'Mysteries', Miracle Plays and Interludes were nearly all plays in one act. The One-Act play came into prominence in the eighteenth century as one of the elements in the long and varied bills of that day. One-Act plays were being presented in Vaudeville houses in America and were used as curtain-raisers in London theatres for the purpose of marking time until the late-dining audiences should arrive. What the twentieth century has done is to firmly establish the status of the One-Act play as a distinct dramatic form of high merit, which may be the vehicle of tragedy or comedy, 'morality' or fantasy or almost anything dramatic. It is now accepted as admirable in itself, as a medium of art. It shows the same relation to the full-length play as the short story shows to the novel. It makes a virtue of economy of means. It aims to produce a single dramatic effect by suggesting the entire history of a soul at some crisis of its career and forcing the spectator to look upon it from an unexpected and suggestive point of view. A One-Act play in exhibiting the present should imply the

past and intimate the future. The author has no leisure for laborious exposition; but his mere projection of a single situation should sum up in itself accumulated results of many antecedent causes. But this does not mean that the writer of One-Act plays can safely ignore the technique of full length plays. "One forgives everything to the founder of the school except the school," wrote the late Barry Pain caustically. He who is a beginner in the art of the One-Act play would do well to learn first the older business of plot-construction and characterization in regular drama.

There is one point to which the beginner never attaches sufficient importance, and that is construction. A common—perhaps the commonest—mistake is to imagine that a play, in one act or in three, may be begun with nothing more than a vague idea of what is going to happen, and that a dashed-off beginning, plus a sketchy idea of the plot, plus a cheerful hope that inspiration will arrive during the process of writing, is enough to go on with. But inspiration, unfortunately, generally declines to arrive. If you begin a play whose

end is nebulous, the chances are that the end which eventually materialises won't fit on to what is already written. The outline of the plot should therefore be clear in the very beginning. Every play, whatever its type, should have a climax, an emotional point to which the whole plot moves. This is particularly true of the One-Act play. It would help if the One-Act play contains only one incident of first-class importance, and the characters are few. If for the purpose of your plot, you require a considerable number of people, as at a house-party, a picnic, or a smoking room crowd, see to it that you do not attempt to individualise more than five or six, and that each of them really does something. It is fatal to overload a plot with characters, and more so in short play. The best course would be to choose a few, and preferably contrasting characters for the plot. The clash of conflicting natures is interesting, even in a thin plot; but the finest plot will bore if the characters are all amiable nonentities. The logical line of development is as follows: First, the theme, that is the idea upon which the plot is going

to be based. After that comes the plot itself, with a climax which, when reached, should be followed as soon as possible by an appropriate conclusion. The interest should be continuous, that is to say, relate to the development of the plot. It is bad art to drag in incidents, no matter how original or striking in themselves, if they do not agree with the general theme. Incidents in the One-Act play should be strictly appropriate and not isolated events which could be omitted without injury to the plot.

The first concern of the author is that he determine definitely the theme, and the dominant emotional effect which he wishes to carry to his audience. The theme of the play must be made manifest, else there is no effect; emotional functioning must be provoked, else there is no drama. Plot is the concrete exemplification whereby these ends may be secured, and is therefore an unusually vital element in the One-Act play. In this shorter form of drama, there is not always opportunity for the largest possibilities in characterization. For this reason one is safe in generalizing that, in the One-Act play, plot comes

first and characterization second. A good dramatic plot will often make amends for a certain lack of characterization, but characterization itself will never redeem triteness of plot. Since the One-Act play has for its end a singleness of impression, it follows that the first essential element of its plot must be a specific dramatic situation. It is for this crucial dramatic situation that the One-Act form exists; and it is towards this end that all the ancillary elements of plot-development converge. It can be safely claimed that all the plays in the present selection rigorously fulfil this requirement. In each there is a progressive evolution until the interplay among characters and incidents comes to a significant finality.

In the end our thanks are due and are hereby tendered to all those who have permitted us to use copyright pieces included in this selection.

ANTON CHEKHOV

THE PROPOSAL

A Jest

Lomov :hero

Natalya :-Heroin

Tchubukov :father

CHARACTERS

STEPAN STEPANOVITCH TCHUBUKOV—a landowner

NATALYA STEPANOVNA—his daughter, aged 25

IVAN VASSILYEVITCH LOMOV—a neighbour of Tchubukov's, a healthy, well-nourished, but hypochondriacal landowner

THE PROPOSAL

Drawing-room in TCHUBUKOV'S *house.* TCHUBUKOV *and* LOMOV ; *the latter enters wearing evening dress and gloves.*

TCHUBUKOV (*going to meet him*) : My darling whom do I see ? Ivan Vassilyevitch ! Delighted ! (*Shakes hands.*) Well, this is a surprise, dearie...... How are you ?

LOMOV : I thank you. And pray, how are you ?

TCHUBUKOV : We are getting on all right, thanks to your prayers, my angel, and all the rest of it. Please sit down......It's too bad, you know, to forget your neighbours, darling. But, my dear, why this ceremoniousness ? A swallow-tail, gloves, and all the rest of it ! Are you going visiting, my precious ?

LOMOV : No, I have only come to see you, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch.

TCHUBUKOV : Then why the swallow-tail, my charmer ? As though you were paying calls on New Year's Day !

LOMOV : You see, this is how it is (*Takes his arm.*) I have come, honoured. Stepan Stepanovitch, to trouble you with a request. I have more than once had the honour of asking for your assistance, and you have always, so to speak—but pardon me, I

am agitated. I will have a drink of water, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch.

[*Drinks water.*]

TCHUBUKOV (*aside*): Come to ask for money! I am not going to give it to him. (*To him*) What is it, my beauty?

LOMOV: You see, Honour Stepanovitch—I beg your pardon, Stepan Honouritch...I am dreadfully agitated, as you see. In short, no one but you can assist me, though of course, I have done nothing to deserve it, and ......and......have no right to reckon upon your assistance......

TCHUBUKOV: Oh, don't spin it out, dearie. Come to the point. Well?

LOMOV: Immediately—in a moment. The fact is that I have come to ask for the hand of your daughter, Natalya Stepanovna.

TCHUBUKOV (*joyfully*): You precious darling! Ivan Vassilyevitch, say it again! I can't believe my ears.

LOMOV: I have the honour to ask......

TCHUBUKOV (*interrupting*): My darling! I am delighted, and all the rest of it. Yes, indeed, and all that sort of thing. (*Embraces and kisses him.*) I have been hoping for it for ages. It has always been my wish. (*Sheds a tear.*) And I have always loved you, my angel, as though you were my own son. God give you both love and good counsel, and all the rest of it. I have always wished for it......Why am I standing here like a post? I am stupefied

with joy, absolutely stupefied.. Oh, from the bottom of my heart......I'll go and call Natasha and that sort of thing,

LOMOV (*touched*): Honoured Stepan Stepanovitch, what do you think ? May I hope that she will accept me ?

TCHUBUKOV: A beauty like you, and she not accept you ! I'll be bound she is as love-sick as a cat, and all the rest of it......In a minute.

[*Goes out.*]

LOMOV: I am cold—I am trembling all over, as though I were in for an examination. The great thing is to make up one's mind. If one thinks about it too long, hesitates, discusses it, waits for one's ideal or for real love, one will never get married...Brr ! I am cold. Natalya Stepanovna is an excellent manager, not bad looking, educated—what more do I want ? But I am beginning to have noises in my head. I am so upset. (*Sips water.*) And get married I must. To begin with, I am thirty-five—a critical age, so to speak. And, secondly, I need a regular, well-ordered life...I have valvular disease of the heart, continual palpitations. I am hasty, and am very easily upset...Now, for instance, my lips are quivering and my right eyelid is twitching...But my worst trouble is with sleep. No sooner have I got into bed and just begun to drop asleep, than I have a shooting pain in my left side and a stabbing at my shoulder and my head..I leap up like a

madman. I walk about a little and lie down again, but no sooner do I drop off than there's shooting pain in my side again. And the same thing twenty times over !...

[*Enter* NATALYA STEPANOVNA.]

NATALYA : Well, so it's you ! Why, and papa said a purchaser had come for the goods ! How do you do Ivan Vassilyevitch ?

LOMOV : How do you do, honoured Natalya Stepanovna !

NATALYA : Excuse my apron and *neglige*. We are shelling peas for drying. How is it you have not been to see us for so long ? Sit down (*They sit down*) Will you have some lunch ?

LOMOV : No thank you, I have already lunched.

NATALYA : Won't you smoke ? Here are the matches...It's a magnificent day, but yesterday it rained so hard that the men did not work at all. How many hay-cocks have you got out ? Only fancy, I have been too eager and had the whole meadow mown, and now I am sorry—I am afraid the hay will rot. It would have been better to wait. But what's this? I do believe you have got on your dress-coat ! That's something new. Are you going to a ball, or what ? And by the way, you are looking nice......Why are you such a swell, really ?

LOMOV (*in agitation*) : You see, honoured Natalya Stepanovna......The fact is that I have made up my mind to ask you to listen to me......Of course, you will be surprised, and even angry, but I......It's horribly cold !

NATALYA: What is it? (*A pause.*) Well?

LOMOV: I will try to be brief. You are aware, honoured Natalya Stepanovna, that from earliest childhood I had the honour of knowing your family. My late aunt and her husband, from whom, as you know, I inherited the estate, always, entertained a profound respect for your papa and your late mamma. The family of the Lomovs and the family of the Tchubukovs have always been the most friendly and, one may say, intimate terms. Moreover, as you are aware, my land is in close proximity to yours. If you remember, my Volovyi meadows are bounden by your birch copse.

NATALYA: Excuse my interrupting you. You say "*my* Volovyi meadows."......But are they yours?

LOMOV: Yes, mine.

NATALYA: Well, what next! The Volovyi meadows are ours, not yours!

LOMOV: No they are mine, honoured Natalya Stepanovna.

NATALYA: That's news to me. How do they come to be yours?

LOMOV: How do they come to be mine? I am speaking of the Volovyi meadows that run like a wedge between your birch copse and the Charred Swāmp.

NATALYA: Quite so. Those are ours.

LOMOV: No, you are mistaken, honoured Natalya Stepanovna, they are mine.

NATALYA : Think what you are saying. Ivan Vassilyevitch ! Have they been yours long ?

LOMOV : What do you mean by "long" ? As long as I can remember they have always been ours.

NATALYA : Well, there you must excuse me.

LOMOV : There is documentary evidence for it, honoured Natalya Stepanovna. The Volovyi meadows were once a matter of dispute, that is true, but now everyone knows that they are mine. And there can be no dispute about it. Kindly consider...my aunt's grandmother gave over those meadows to the peasants of your father's grandfather for their use, rent free, for an indefinite period, in return for their firing her bricks. The peasants of your father's grandfather enjoyed the use of the meadows, rent free for some forty years, and grew used to looking upon them as their own ; afterwards, when the settlement came about after the emancipation......

NATALYA : It is not at all as you say ! Both my grandfather and my great-grandfather considered their land reached to the Charred Swamp—so the Volovyi meadows were ours. I can't understand what there is to argue about. It's really annoying !

LOMOV : I will show you documents, Natalya Stepanovna.

NATALYA : No, you are simply joking, or trying to tease me......A nice sort of surprise ! We have owned the land nearly three hundred years, and all of a sudden we are told that the land is not

ours! Forgive me, Ivan Vassilyevitch, but I positively cannot believe my ears......I don't care about the meadows. They are not more than fifteen acres, and they are only worth some three hundred roubles, but I am revolted by injustice. You may say what you like, but I cannot endure injustice!

LOMOV: Listen to me, I implore you. The peasants of your father's grandfather, as I had already the honour to inform you, made bricks for my aunt's grandmother. My aunt's grandmother, wishing to do something for them......

NATALYA: Grandfather, grandmother, aunt......I don't understand a word of it. The meadows are ours, and that's all about it.

LOMOV: They are mine.

NATALYA: They are ours. If you go on arguing for two days, if you put on fifteen dress coats, they are still ours, ours, ours!......I don't want what's yours, but I don't want to lose what's mine...... You can take that as you please!

LOMOV: I do not care about the meadows, Natalya Stepanovna, but it is matter of principle. If you like, I will make you a present of them.

NATALYA: I might make you a present of them, they are mine. All this is very queer, Ivan Vassilyevitch, to say the least of it. Hitherto we have looked upon you as a good neighbour—a friend. Last year we lent you our threshing-machine and through that we couldn't finish our thresing till

November; and you treat us as if we were gypsies! Make me a present of my own land! Excuse me, but that is not neighbourly. To my thinking it is positively impertinent, if you care to know......

LOMOV: According to you I am a usurper, then? I've never snatched other people's land, madam, and I will allow no one to accuse me of such a thing......(*Goes rapidly to the decanter and drinks water.*) The Volovyi meadows are mine!

NATALYA: It's not true: they are ours!

LOMOV: They are mine!

NATALYA: That's not true. I'll prove it. I'll send our mowers to cut the hay there to-day!

LOMOV: What?

NATALYA: My labourers will be there to-day.

LOMOV: I'll kick them out.

NATALYA: Don't you dare!

LOMOV (*clutches at his heart*): The Volovyi meadows are mine! Do you understand? Mine!

NATALYA: Don't shout, please. You can shout and choke with rage when you are at home, if you like; but here I beg you to keep within bounds.

LOMOV: If it were not for these terrible, agonizing palpitations, madam—if it were not for the throbbing in my temples, I should speak to you very differently. (*Shouts*) The Volovyi meadows are mine!

NATALYA: Ours!

LOMOV: Mine!

NATALYA: Ours!

LOMOV: Mine!

[*Enter* TCHUBUKOV.]

TCHUBUKOV: What is it? What are you shouting about?

NATALYA: Papa, explain to this gentleman, please: to whom do the Volovyi meadows belong—to him or to us?

TCHUBUKOV (*to* LOMOV): My chicken, the meadows are ours.

LOMOV: But upon my word, Stepan Stepanovitch, how did they come to be yours? Do you, at least, be reasonable. My aunt's grandmother gave over the meadows for temporary gratuitous use to your grandfather's peasants. The peasants made use of the land for forty years and got used to regarding it as their own; but when the Settlement came...

TCHUBUKOV: Allow me, my precious...You forget the peasants did not pay your grandmother rent and all the rest of it, just because the ownership of the land was in dispute, and so on...And now every dog knows that they are ours. You can't have seen the map.

LOMOV: I will prove to you that they are mine.

TCHUBUKOV: You never will, my pet.

LOMOV: Yes, I will.

TCHUBUKOV: Why are you shouting my love? You will prove nothing at all by shouting. I don't desire what is yours, and don't intend to give up what is mine. Why ever should I? If it comes

to that, my dear, if you intend to wrangle over the meadows, I would rather give them to the peasants than to you, that I would !

Lomov : I don't understand it. What right have you to give away another man's property ?

Tchubukov : Allow me to decide for myself whether I have the right or no. I may say, young man, I am not accustomed to being spoken to in that tone, and all the rest of it. I am twice as old as you are, young man, and I beg you to speak to me without getting excited and all the rest of it.

Lomov : Why, you simply take me for a fool and are laughing at me ! You call my land yours, and then you expect me to be cool about it and to speak to you properly ! That's not the way good neighbours behave, Stepan Stepanovitch. You are not a neighbour, but a usurper ?

Tchubukov : What ? What did you say ?

Natalya : Papa, send the men at once to mow the meadows

Tchubukov (*to* Lomov) : What did you say, sir ?

Natalya : The Volovyi meadows are ours, and I won't give them up. I won't ! I won't !

Lomov : We will see about that. I'll prove to you in court that they are mine.

Tchubukov : In court ? You can take it into court, sir, and all the rest of it ! You can ! I know you —you are only waiting for a chance to go to law, and so on... A pettifogging character ! All your family were fond of litigation—all of them !

LOMOV : I beg you not to insult my family. The Lomovs have all been honest men, and not one of them has ever been on his trial for embezzling money like your uncle !

TCHUBUKOV : Well you Lomovs have all been mad !

NATALYA : Everyone of them—everyone of them !

TCHUBUKOV : Your grandfather was a dipsomaniac, and your youngest aunt, Nastasya Mihailovna, ran away with an architect, and so on.

LOMOV : And your mother was a hunchback. (*Clutches at his heart.*) The shooting pain in my side !...The blood has rushed to my head ...... Holy Saints !...... Water !

TCHUBUKOV : And your father was a gambler and a glutton !

NATALYA : And there was no one like your aunt for talking scandal !

LOMOV : My left leg has gone numb......And you are an intriguer ! ......Oh, my heart ! ......And it is no secret that before the elections you......There are flashes before my eyes !......Where is my hat ?

NATALYA : It's mean ! It's dishonest ! It's disgusting !

TCHUBUKOV : And you yourself are a viperish, double faced, mischief-making man. Yes, indeed !

LOMOV : Here is my hat......My heart ! ......Which way am I to go ? Where is the door ? Oh ! I believe I am dying. I've lost the use of my leg.

[*Goes towards the door.*]

TCHUBUKOV (*calling after him*) : Never set foot within my door again !

NATALYA: Take it into court! We shall see!

[LOMOV *goes out staggering.*]

TCHUBUKOV: Damnation take him!

[*Walks about in excitement.*]

NATALYA: What a wretch! How is one to believe in good neighbours after that!

TCHUBUKOV: Blackguard! Scarecrow!

NATALYA: The object! Collars other people's land—then abuses them!

TCHUBUKOV: And that noodle—that eyesore—had the face to make a proposal, and all the rest of it. Just fancy, a proposal!

NATALYA: What proposal?

TCHUBUKOV: Why, he came here on purpose to propose to you!

NATALYA: To propose? To me? Why didn't you tell me so before?

TCHUBUKOV: And he had got himself up in his dress coat on purpose! The sausage! The shrimp!

NATALYA: To me? A proposal! Ah! (*She falls into an armchair and moans*) Bring him back! Bring him back! Oh, bring him back!

TCHUBUKOV: Bring whom back?

NATALYA: Make haste, make haste! I feel faint! Bring him back!

[*Hysterics.*]

TCHUBUKOV: What is it! What's the matter? (*Clutches at his head.*) I do have a life of it! I shall shoot myself! I shall hang myself! They'll be the death of me!

NATALYA: I am dying! Bring him back!

TCHUBUKOV : Tfoo ! Directly. Don't howl. (*Runs off.*)

NATALYA (*alone, moans*) : What have we done! Bring him back ! Bring him back !

TCHUBUKAV (*runs in*) : He is just coming in, and all the rest of it. Damnation take him ! Ough ! Talk to him yourself, I don't want to......

NATALYA (*moans*) : Bring him back !

TCHUBUKOV (*shouts*) : He is coming. I tell you ! What a task it is, O Lord, to be the father of a grown-up daughter ! I shall cut my throat ! I shall certainly cut my throat ! We've abused the man, put him to shame, kicked him out, and it is all your doing—your doing !

NATALYA : No, it was yours ?

TCHUBUKOV : Oh, it's my fault, so that's it ; (LOMOV *appears at the door.*) Well talk to him yourself. [*He goes out. Enter* LOMOV *in a state of collapse.*]

LOMOV : Fearful palpitations ! My leg is numb...... there's stitch in my side......

NATALYA : Forgive us ; we were too hasty, Ivan Vassilyevitch. I remember now : the Volovyi meadows really are yours.

LOMOV : My heart is throbbing frightfully......The meadows are mine......There's a twitching in both my eyelids.

NATALYA : Yes, they are yours, they are. Sit down. (*They sit down*) We were wrong.

LOMOV : I acted from principle......I do not value the land, but I value the principle......

NATALYA : Just so, the principle......Let us talk of something else.

LOMOV : Especially as I have proofs. My aunt's grandmother gave the peasants of your father's grandfather......

NATALYA : Enough, enough about that......(*Aside*) I don't know how to begin. (*To him*) Shall you soon be going shooting ?

LOMOV : I expect to go grouse shooting after the harvest, honoured Natalya Stepanovna. Oh ! did you hear ? Only fancy, I had such a misfortune ! My Tracker, whom I think you know, has fallen lame.

NATALYA : What a pity ! How did it happen ?

LOMOV : I don't know...He must have put his paw out of joint, or perhaps some other dog bit it...... (*Sighs.*) My very best dog, to say nothing of the money I have spent on him ! You know I paid Mironov a hundred and twenty-five roubles for him.

NATALYA : You gave too much, Ivan Vassilyevitch !

LOMOV : Well, to my mind it was very cheap. He is a delightful dog.

NATALYA : Father gave eighty-five roubles for his Backer, and Backer is a much better dog than your Tracker.

LOMOV : Backer a better dog than Tracker ? What nonsense ! (*Laughs.*) Backer a better dog than Tracker !

NATALYA: Of course he is better. It's true that Backer is young yet—he is hardly a full-grown dog—but for points and cleverness even Voltchanetsky hasn't one to beat him.

LOMOV: Excuse me, Natalya Stepanovna, but you forget that your Backer has a pug-jaw, and a dog with a pug-jaw is never any good for gripping.

NATALYA: A pug-jaw! That's the first time I've heard so.

LOMOV: I assure you the lower jaw is shorter than the upper.

NATALYA: Why, have you measured?

LOMOV: Yes. He is all right for coursing, no doubt, but for gripping he'd hardly do.

NATALYA: In the first place, our Backer is a pedigree dog, son of Harness and Chisel, but you can't even tell what breed your spotty piebald is... ...Then he is as old and ugly as a broken-down horse.

LOMOV: He is old, but I wouldn't exchange him for half a dozen of your Backers......How could I? Tracker is a dog, but Backer—there can be no question about it. Every huntsman has packs and packs of dogs like your Backer. Twenty-five roubles would be a good price for him.

NATALYA: There is a demon of contradictoriness in you to-day, Ivan Vassilyevitch. First you make out that the meadows are yours, then that your Tracker is better dog than Backer. I don't like a man to say what he does not think. You know perfectly well that Backer is worth a hundred of your......stupid Trackers. Why, then, say the opposite?

LOMOV: I see, Natalya Stepanovna, that you think I am blind or a fool. Do you understand that your Backer has a pug-jaw?

NATALYA: It's not true!

LOMOV: It is!

NATALYA (*shouts*): It's not true!

LOMOV: Why are you shouting, madam?

NATALYA: Why do you talk nonsense? This is revolting! It's time your Tracker was shot—and you compare him to Backer!

LOMOV: Excuse me, I cannot continue this argument. I have palpitations.

NATALYA: I have noticed that men argue most about hunting who know least about it.

LOMOV: Madam, I beg you to be silent. My heart is bursting. (*Shouts*) Be silent!

NATALYA: I will not be silent till you own that Backer is a hundred times better than your Tracker.

LOMOV: A hundred times worse! Plague take your Backer! My temples......my eyes......my shoulder......

NATALYA: There is no need for plague to take your fool of a Tracker—he is as good as dead already.

LOMOV (*weeping*): Be silent! My heart is bursting!

NATALYA: I won't be silent.

Enter TCHUBUKOV.]

TCHUBUKOV (*coming in*): What now?

NATALYA: Papa, tell me truly, on your conscience, which is the better dog—our Backer or his Tracker?

LOMOV : Stepan Stepanovitch, I implore you tell me one thing only: has your Backer a pug-jaw or not? Yes or no ?

TCHUBUKOV : And what if he has ? It's of no consequence. Anyway, there is no better dog in the whole district, and all the rest of it.

LOMOV : But my Tracker is better, isn't he ? Honestly ?

TCHUBUKOV : Don't excite yourself, my precious. Your Tracker certainly has his good qualities...... He is a well-bred dog, has good legs, and is well set-up, and all the rest of it. But the dog, if you care to know, my beauty, has two serious defects he is old and is snub-nosed. turned up nose

LOMOV : Excuse me, I have palpitations......Let us take the facts......If you will kindly remember, at Maruskin's my Tracker kept shoulder to shoulder with the Count's Swinger, while your Backer was a good half-mile behind.

TCHUBUKOV : Yes, he was, because the Count's huntsman gave him a crack with his whip.

LOMOV : He deserved it. All the other dogs were after the fox, but Backer got hold of a sheep.

TCHUBUKOV : That's not true ! ......Darling, I am hot-tempered, and I beg you to drop this conversation. He lashed him because everyone is jealous of another man's dog......Yes, they are all envious! And you are not free from blame on that score either, sir. As soon as you notice, for instance, that someone's dog is better than your Tracker, at once you begin with this and that, and all the rest of it. I remember it all !

LOMOV: I remember it too!

TCHUBUKOV (*mimics him*): "I remember it too!" And what do you remember?

LOMOV: Palpitations!......My leg has no feeling in it. I can't......

NATALYIA (*mimicking him*); "Palpitations!"......A fine sportsman! You ought to be lying on the stove in the kitchen squashing blackbeetles instead of hunting foxes. Palpitations!

TCHUBUKOV: Yes, you are a fine sportsman, really! With your palpitations you ought to stay at home, instead of jolting in the saddle. It would not matter if you hunted, but you only ride out to angle and interfere with other men's dogs and all the rest of it. I am hot-tempered, let us drop this subject. You are not a sportsman at all.

LOMOV: And you—are you a sportsman? You only go to the hunt to intrigue and make up to the Count......My heart!......You are an intriguer!

TCHUBUKOV: What? Me an intriguer? (*Shouts*) Hold your tongue!

LOMOV: Intriguer!

TCHUBUKOV: Milksop! Puppy!

LOMOV: Old rat! Jesuit!

TCHUBUKOV: Hold your tongue, or I'll shot you with a filthy gun like a partridge! Noodle!

LOMOV; Everyone knows—oh, my heart!—that your wife used to beat you......My leg......my forehead......my eyes!......I shall drop! I shall drop!

TCHUBUKOV: And you go in terror of your housekeeper!

LOMOV: Oh, oh! My heart has burst! I can't feel my shoulder—what has become of my shoulder? I am dying! (*Falls into an armchair.*) A doctor! [*Swoons.*]

TCHUBUKOV: Puppy! Milksop! Noodle I feel faint! (*Drinks water,*) Faint!

NATALYA: You are a fine sportsman! You don't know how to sit on your horse. (*To her father*) Papa, what's the matter with him? Papa! Look, papa! (*Shrieks.*) Ivan Vassilyevitch! He is dead!

TCHUBUKOV: I feel faint! I can't breathe! Give me air!

NATALYA He is dead! (*Shakes* LOMOV *by the sleeve.*) Ivan Vassilyevitch! Ivan Vassilyevitch! What have we done! He is dead! (*Falls into an armchair.*) A doctor! a doctor!

Hysterics.]

TCHUBUKOV: Och! What is it? What do you want?

NATALYA (*moans*): He is dead! He is dead!

TCHUBUKOV: Who is dead? (*Looking at* LOMOV) He really is dead! Holy Saints! Water! A doctor! (*Holds a glass of water to* LOMOV'*s lips.*) Drink!......No, he won't drink. So he is dead, and all the rest of it. I do have a life of it! Why don't I put a bullet through my brains? Why is it I haven't cut my throat? What am I waiting for? Give me a knife! Give me a pistol! (LOMOV *makes a slight movement.*) I believe he is reviving......Have a drink of water. That's right.

LOMOV: Flashes—dizziness—where am I?

TCHUBUKOV: You'd better make haste and get married—and go to the devil! She consents. (*Joins the hands of* LOMOV *and his daughter.*) She accepts you, and all the rest of it. I give you my blessing, and so on. Only leave me in peace.

LOMOV: Eh? What? (*Getting up*) who?

TCHUBUKOV: She accepts you. Well? Kiss each other and......be damned to you!

NATALYA (*moans*): He is alive! Yes, yes, I accept.

TCHUBUKOV: Kiss!

LOMOV: Eh? Whom? (*Kisses* NATALYA STEPANOVNA.) Delighted! Excuse me, what's the point? Oh, yes I understand! Palpitations......dizziness...... I am happy. Natalya Stepanovna (*Kisses her hand.*) My leg is numb!

TCHUBUKOV: But......still you must admit now that Tracker is not as good as Backer.

LOMOV: He is better!

NATALYA: He is worse!

TCHUBUKOV: Well, here's the beginning of family happiness! Champagne!

LOMOV: He is better!

NATALYA: He is not! He is not! He is not!

TCHUBUKOV (*trying to shout them down*): Champagne! Champagne!

CURTAIN

SEAN O'CASEY

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

A Comedy

CHARACTERS

DARRY BERRILL—about fifty ; stocky, obstinate, with a pretty big belly. He is completely bald, except for a tuft of grey hair just above the forehead.

BARRY DERRILL—Darry's neighbour. Same age as Darry. Thin, easy-going, big moustache, and is very near-sighted.

LIZZIE BERRILL—Darry's wife. About forty-five. A good woman about the house, but that's about all.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

SCENE : *A big comfortable kitchen. Steep stairs. almost like a ladder, leading to upper room, top right. Huge fireplace, right. Some chairs, one heavy, with rubbered castors. Small settee, and table. Chest of drawers, left, on top of which stands a gramophone: Door back, and to left of door a window. To right of door, a dresser, on which is, as well as delf, a large clock of the alarm type. To right of dresser, on a nail, hangs a whip ; to the left of dresser hangs a mandolin. On table, a quantity of unwashed delf. To right of fire place, a lumber room. The room, at night, is lighted by an electric bulb, hanging from centre of ceiling. It is a fine early autumn evening, with the sun low in the heavens. On wall, back, a large red card on which " Do It Now" is written in white letters. A sink under the window.*

DARRY (*at door of room above. He is shaving, and his chin is covered with lather*) : This shaving water's dead cold, woman. D'ye hear me ? This shaving water's dead cold,

LIZZIE (*busy about the room—quietly*) : Come down and heat it, then.

DARRY (*scornfully*) : Too much to do, I suppose. I'd do all that has to be done here, three times

over, 'n when all was finished, I'd be sighing for something to do.

LIZZIE : If you had half of what I have to do here, at the end of the evening you'd be picked up dead out of the debris.

DARRY : I would ?

LIZZIE : You would.

DARRY : Sure ?

LIZZIE : Certain.

DARRY : If I only had half to do ?

LIZZIE : Or less.

DARRY : I'd be picked up out of the debris ?

LIZZIE : Out of the middle of it.

DARRY : Dead ?

LIZZIE : As a mackerel.

DARRY (*fiercely*) : I'm always challenging you to change places for a few hours, but you won't do it. I'd show you what a sinecure of a job you had here, while I'm sweating out in the fields.

LIZZIE : Go out 'n finish the mowing of the meadow. It 'll take you only half an hour or so, 'n there's plenty of light in the sky still.

DARRY (*who has been shaving himself during this argument*) : The meadow'll do to be done to-morrow. Why don't you let me do what's to be done in the house, an' you go 'n mow the meadow? Why don't you do that ? 'don't you do that ? 'you do that ? Agony to look at you ; agony to listen to you ; agony, agony to be anywhere near you.

LIZZIE: I'd just like to see you doing what's to be done about the house—I'd just like to see you.

DARRY: What is there to be done about the house—will you tell us that?

LIZZIE: There's the pig 'n the heifer 'n the hens to be fed 'n tended. There's ironing, cooking, washing, 'n sewing to be done.

DARRY: Sewing! An' only a button back 'n front of me so that it's next thing to a miracle that my trousers are kept from starting the neighbours talking.

LIZZIE: If you say much more, I'll go 'n mow the meadow, 'n leave you to see what you can make of the house-work.

DARRY (*angrily*): Buzz off, buzz off, then, an' I'll show you how the work of a house is done. Done quietly; done with speed, 'n without a whisper of fuss in its doing. Buzz off, if you want to, 'n I'll show you 'n all your sex how the work of a house is done!

[LIZZIE *violently pulls off a jazz-coloured overall she is wearing, and flings it on the floor.*]

LIZZIE (*furiously*): Put that on you, then, 'n do what remains to be done about the house, while I go an' mow the meadow. Get into it, 'n show the world an' your poor wife the wonders you can do when you're under a woman's overall.

DARRY (*a little frightened*): Oh, I'll manage all right.

LIZZIE: An' don't you let that Alice Lanigan in here while I'm away either, d'ye hear?

DARRY: What Alice Lanigan?

LIZZIE (*in a tempre*): What Alice Lanigan! The Alice Lanigan I caught you chattering to yesterday, when you should have been mowing the meadow. The Alice Lanigan that's setting you on to nag at me about the little I have to do in the house. The Alice Lanigan that's goading you into the idea that if you were a little slimmer round the belly, you'd be a shevaleer, an's getting you to do physical jerks. The Alice Lanigan that's on the margin of fifty, 'n assembles herself together as if she was a girl in her teens, jutting out her bust when she's coming in, 'n jutting out her behind when she's going out, like the Lady of Shalott to catch the men—that is the Alice Lanigan I mean.

DARRY: I don't be thinking of Alice Lanigan.

LIZZIE: I've seen you, when you thought I slumbered 'n slep, naked, with nothing at all on you, doing your physical jerks in front of the looking glass 'n that, too, when the lessons of a Mission were still hot in your heart—an' all for Alice Lanigan. Maybe you don't know that she has a kid who has never had a pat on the head from a father.

DARRY: You buzz off now, 'n I'll show how the work of a house is done.

LIZZIE (*while she is putting a broad-brimmed hat on her head, pulling a pair of old gloves over her hands, and taking down a whip hanging from a nail in the wall*): I'm telling you it's a dangerous thing to

shake hands with Alice Lanigan, even with a priest giving the introduction. The day'll come soon when you'll know she is making mechanical toys of you 'n that other old fool, Barry Derrill, who's so near-sighted that he can't see the sky, unless the moon's shining in it!

DARRY: Cheerio.

LIZZIE (*at the door*): I'm going now, 'n we'll see how you do the work of the house.

DARRY: Hail 'n farewell to you. An' mind you, this 'll be only the beginning of things.

LIZZIE: God grant that it won't be the end, an' that when I come back, I'll at least find the four walls standing.

[*She goes out.* DARRY *strolls to the door, and watches her going down the road.*]

DARRY (*scornfully to himself*): Mow the meadow! Well, let her see her folly out.

[*As she shuts the door, the clock in the distant Town Hall strikes eight,* DARRY *returns, glances at the clock on the dresser, notices that it has stopped, takes it up, puts his ear against it, shakes it, begins to wind it, finds it difficult to turn, puts added strength into the turning, and a whirring rattle like a strong spring breaking, comes from the inside of the clock. He hastily replaces the clock on the dresser. After a few seconds' thought, he takes it up again, removes the back and part of a big, broken spring darts out, which he hurriedly crams in again, and puts the clock on the dresser.*]

DARRY : Lizzie again !

[He catches sight of the gramophone, looks at it, thinks for a second, goes over to the chest of drawers, takes some records from behind it and fixes one on the disc of the gramophone. He takes off his waistcoat, loosens his braces, stands stiff, strokes his thighs, pats his belly, and tries to push it back a little. He starts the gramophone going, runs to the centre of the room, and lies down on the broad of his back. The gramophone begins to give directions for physical exercises, to which DARRY *listens and awkwardly, clumsily and puffingly, tries to follow the movements detailed in the words spoken by the gramophone when the music commences.]*

GRAMOPHONE : Lie on back ; hands behind the head ; feet together——are you ready ? Bend the right knee ; draw it into the waistline, towards the chest—commence !

*[*DARRY *is too slow, or the gramophone is too quick, for he can't keep up with the time of the music. When he finds that he is behind the time of the music,* DARRY *increases his speed by partial performance of the movements, and so gets into touch with the time, but presently, blowing and panting, he is out of time again by a beat or two. He climbs stiffly on to his feet, goes over to gramophone, and puts the indicator to "Slow."*

DARRY : Phuh. Too quick, too damn quick altogether.

[*He starts the gramophone going, runs to the centre of the room, and again lies down on the broad of his back. When the music begins he goes through the movements as before; but the music is playing so slowly now that he finds it impossible to go slowly enough to keep to the time of the tune. When he finds himself in front of a beat, he stops and puffs and waits for the beat to catch up with him before he recommences. As he is going through these movements, the door opens, and* BARRY DERRILL *comes into the room. He has a mandolin under his arm, and is wearing wide-rimmed, thick-lensed spectacles.*]

BARRY (*briskly*): Come 'n kiss me sweet 'n twenty —what the hell are you trying to do?

DARRY: Can't you see what I'm trying to do? Take off your spectacles 'n get a closer look. Keeping myself fit 'n flexible—that's what I'm trying to do.

BARRY: The rhythm's too slow, man; tense your muscles; you're not tun'd into the movements properly, man.

DARRY: The indicator must have shifted. Slip over 'n put it to the point marked medium, 'n then get down here 'n give us a hand.

BARRY: What about the prologue of playing the song we're to sing at the Town Hall concert?

DARRY: Get down 'n have five minutes of this, first; we'll both sing the better for it.

BARRY (*dubiously*): Never done it to music, 'n I

wouldn't to able to keep in touch with the,—with the measure.

DARRY: The music makes it easier, man. Keep your eye on me 'n move when I move.

[BARRY *reluctantly takes off his coat and waistcoat, goes over to the gramophone, puts his nose against the instrument, and puts the indicator to "Fast."*]

DARRY: To do this properly you'd want to be wearing shorts. Right; now keep in touch with rhythm, or you'll mar everything. Start her off and stretch yourself down.

[BARRY *starts the gramophone, runs over and lies down opposite to* DARRY, *so that the soles of their feet are only a few inches apart.*]

GRAMOPHONE (*very rapidly*): Lie on back; hands behind the head; feet together—are you ready? Bend the right knee; draw it into the waistline towards the chest; breathe out—commence!

[*This tempo of the tune forces them to do the exercise in a frantic way, till it dawns on* DARRY, *who is nearly exhausted, that there's something wrong. He stops while* BARRY *goes on manfully.*]

DARRY (*scornfully*): Eh, eh, there, wait a minute, wait a minute, man. Don't you see anything wrong?

BARRY (*stopping*): No; what's wrong?

DARRY (*testily*): Aw, what's wrong! We're congestin' ourselves with speed; that's what's wrong. You must have jammed the indicator hard to Fast. (*He gets up, goes to the gramophone, and*

puts it right.) We 're entertainin' ourselves, Barry, and not tryin' to say the Rosary.

[*He comes back and stretches himself again on the floor. The music begins and the two men commence the exercises. After a few moments,* DARRY *slows down a little, misses several beats, and tries to blame* BARRY.]

DARRY (*excitedly keeping up the movements, but out of time, as he talks*) : Try to keep the proper rhythm up, man. (*He hums the tune of "Coming thro' the Rye.*") Dah th' didee dah th' diddy dah th' diddy dee—that way man. Dah th' diddy dah th' diddy (*rapidly*). Keep your eye on me. Dah th' diddy dee.

[*After a few movements* DARRY *is out of time and breathless ; he stops and sits up to complain, but he really wants to get a rest.*]

DARRY (*with aggravated patience*) : Barry, you're spoiling the whole thing by getting out of time. Don't let your arms and legs go limber, tense your muscles. Three beats to the bar, see ? Now !

[*They start again ;* DARRY *is soon behind time, blowing and puffing out of him.* BARRY *keeps to the beat of the tune splendidly.*]

DARRY (*angrily*) : You're going too damn quick, altogether, now, man !

BARRY : No I'm not—I'm there to the tick every time.

DARRY (*violently*) : There to the tick—how is it you're not in the line with me, then, if you're there

to the tick ? I don't know whether you're in front of me or behind me. Are you too stiff or what ?

BARRY : I'm there to the second every time. It's you that's missin' a beat in the bar.

DARRY (*indignantly, stopping to talk, while* BARRY *goes on*) : I'm missin' it because I'm tryin' to foster you into the right balance 'n rhythm of the movements. That's why I'm missin' it. (*Loudly*) An' I'm wastin' me time !

BARRY (*sharply*) : I'm doin' me best, amn't I ?

DARRY (*more sharply still*) : Your best's a hell of a way behind what's wanted. It's pitiful 'n painful to be watchin' you, man. (*He stands up and looks at* BARRY, *who keeps going.*) Eh eh, you'll do yourself an injury, Barry. Get up 'n we'll do the song. (*As* BARRY *goes on*) Oh, get up 'n we'll do the song.

[BARRY *gets up reluctantly, and* DARRY *goes over and stops the gramophone.*]

BARRY : I was doin' it well enough, if you'd let me alone.

DARRY (*scornfully*) : Yes ; like the "Londonderry Air" play'd in march time.

[*They get their mandolins and stand side by side at the back.*]

DARRY : Now we walk in a semicircle down to the front, 'n bow, you remember ? Ready ?

BARRY : Yep.

DARRY : Go !

[*They both step off to the right, take a few steps, and then they halt.*]

BARRY: Something wrong; we don't go round the same way, do we?

DARRY (*testily*): Of course there's something wrong; of course we don't go round the same way. Can't you try to remember, Barry? You're to go to the left, to the left.

BARRY: I remember distinctly I was to go to the right.

DARRY (*irritably*): Oh, don't be such an egotist, Barry. Now think for a minute. (*A pause.*) Now make up your mind—d'ye want to go to the left or the right?

BARRY (*testily*): Oh, left, right—any way.

DARRY: Left, then. Go.

[*They march round, one to the right, the other to the left, meet in the front, and bow.*]

DARRY: You start, BARRY, my boy.

BARRY (*singing*):

One summer eve a handsome man met a handsome maiden strolling.

DARRY:

Down where the bees were hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing;

BARRY:

Said she we'll sit down here a while, all selfish thoughts controlling.

DARRY:

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing:

BARRY :

Said she we'll meditate on things, things high 'n edifying.

How all things live 'n have their day 'n end their day by dying.

He put his hand on her white breast an' murmur'd life is trying.

DARRY :

Down where the bees are humin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

BARRY :

The moon glanc'd down 'n wonder'd what the pair of them were doing.

DARRY :

Down where the bees were hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing ;

BARRY :

Then th' moon murmur'd, I feel hot, 'n fear a storm is brewing,

DARRY :

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

BARRY :

She talk'd so well of things so high, he started to reward her,

The moon ran in behind a cloud, for there was none to guard her.

I'll take that off, she said, you'd ruin the lace that's round the border,

DARRY :

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

BARRY :
White-featur'd 'n thin goodie-goodies rush around excited,
DARRY :
Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing ;
BARRY :
Proclaiming that the dignity of living has been blighted,
DARRY :
Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.
BARRY :
But when the light is soft 'n dim, discovery disarming.
The modest moon behind the clouds, young maidens, coy 'n charming,
Still cuddle men who cuddle them 'n carry on alarming,
DARRY :
Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

[*When the song has ended,* DARRY *cocks his ear and listens.*]

BARRY ; Shell we try it once more ?

DARRY ; Shush shut up, can't you ?

[DARRY *goes over to the door, opens it and listens intently. There is heard the rattling whirr caused by the steady and regular movement of a mowing. The distant Town Hall clock strikes nine.*]

DARRY (*hastily putting the mandolin away*): I forgot. I'll have to get going.

BARRY: Get going at what?

DARRY: House-work. (*He begins to get into the overall let off by* LIZZIE.) I dared her, an' she left me to do the work of the house while she was mowing the meadow. If it isn't done when she comes back, then sweet good-bye to the status I had in the home. (*He finds it difficult to get the over-all on.*) Did dih dih, where's the back 'n where's the front, 'n which is the bottom 'n which is the top?

BARRY: Take it quietly, take it quietly, Darry.

DARRY (*resentfully*): Take it quietly? An' the time galloping by? I can't stand up on a chair 'n say to the sun, stand thou still there, over the meadow th' missus is mowing, can I?

BARRY: I know damn well you can't, but you're not going to expedite matters by rushing around in a hurry.

DARRY (*he has struggled into the overall*): Expedite matters! It doesn't seem to strike you that when you do things quickly, things are quickly done. Expedite matters! I suppose loitering to look at you lying on the broad of your back, jiggling, your legs about, was one way of expediting matters; an' listening to you plucking curious sounds out of a mandolin, an' singing a questionable song, was another way of expediting matters?

BARRY: You pioneered me into doing the two fo them yourself.

DARRY (*busy with the pot on the fire*) : I pioneered you into doing them ! Barry Derrill, there's such a thing in the world as a libel. You came strutting in with a mandolin under your arm, didn't you ?

BARRY : I did, but——

DARRY : An' you sang your song.

BARRY : Yes, but——

DARRY : When you waltz'd in, I was doing calisthenics, wasn't I ?

BARRY : I know you were ; but all the same——

DARRY : An' you flung yourself down on the floor, and got yourself into a tangle trying to do them too, did't you ?

BARRY : Hold on a second——

DARRY : Now, I can't carry the conversation into a debate, for I have to get going. So if you can't give a hand, go, 'n let me do the things that have to be done, in an orderly 'n quiet way.

BARRY : 'Course I'll give a hand—only waiting to be asked.

DARRY (*looking at the clock, suddenly*) : Is the clock stopped ?

BARRY (*taking up clock and putting it close to his ear*) : There's no ticking, 'n it's hours slow.

DARRY : Lizzie again ! Forgot to wind it. Give the key a few turns, Barry, an' put the hands on to half-past nine.

[BARRY *starts to wind the clock.* DARRY *goes over to table, gets a basin of water, begins to wash the delf, humming to himself the air of the song, "Down where the bees are humming."* BARRY

winds and winds away, but no sign is given of a tightening of the spring inside. He looks puzzled, winds again, and is about to silently put the clock back where he found it, when DARRY *turns and looks at him questioningly.*]

DARRY : You've broken the damn thing, have you ?

BARRY : I didn't touch it.

DARRY : Didn't touch it ? Amn't I after lookink at you twisting an' tearing at it for nearly an hour ? (*He comes over to* BARRY.) Show me that. (*He takes the clock from* BARRY *and opens the back, and the spring darts out.* Didn't touch it. Oh, for God's sake be more careful when you're handling things in this house! Dih dih dih. (*He pushes the spring back, and slaps the clock down on the dresser.*) You must have the hands of a gorilla, man. Here, come over 'n wipe while I wash.

[*A slight pause while the two of them work at the delf.* DARRY *anxiously watches* BARRY, *who, being very near-sighted, hold severything he wipes close up to his spectacles.*]

DARRY (*suddenly*) : Look out, look out, there—you're not leaving that jug on the table at all ; you're depositing it in the air, man !

BARRY (*peering down at the table*) : Am I ? Don't be afraid, I won't let anything drop.

DARRY (*humming the song*): Dum dah de de dum dah dee dee dum dah dee dee dee dah ah dum.

BARRY (*swinging his arm to the tune*) : Down where the bees are humming' an' the wild flowers gaily growing. . . . .

DARRY: Fine swing, you know. Dum dah dee dee dum dah dee dee dum dah dee dee dah ah dum.

BARRY (*swinging his arm*): Down where the bees are hummin—

[BARRY'*s arm sends the jug flying off the table on to the floor.*]

DARRY (*yelling*): You snaky-arm'd candle-power-ey'd elephant, look at what you're after doing!

BARRY (*heatedly*): It's only a tiny jug, anyhow, 'n you can hardly see the pieces on the floor!

DARRY (*just as heatedly*): An' if I let you do much more, they would soon be big enough to bury us! Sit down, sit down in the corner there; do nothing, say nothing, an', if I could, I'd put a safety curtain round you. For God's sake, touch nothing while I run out an' give the spuds to the pig.

[DARRY *dashes over to the fire, whips the pot off, and runs out. He leaves the door open, and again the rattling whirr of a mowing machine can be heard.* BARRY *sits dejectedly in a corner. After a few moments a bump is heard outside, followed by a yell from* DARRY, *who, a second later, comes rushing madly in, a bloody handkerchief pressed to his nose. He flings himself flat on the floor on his back, elevating his nose as much as possible.*]

DARRY: Get me something cold to put down the back of my neck, quick!

BARRY (*frightened*): What the hell did you do to yourself?

DARRY : I didn't bend low enough when I was going in, 'n I gave myself such a, oh such a bang on my nose on the concrete. Get something cold, man, to shove down the back of my neck 'n stop the bleeding !

BARRY : Keep the nose sticking up in the air as high as you can. I don't know where to get something cold to shove down the back of your neck. I knew this rushing round wouldn't expedite matters.

DARRY (*with a moan of resentment as he hears "expedite matters"*) : Oh, pull yourself together, man, 'n remember we're in the middle of an emergency.

BARRY : A little block of ice, now, would come in handy.

DARRY : A little—oh, a little block of ice ! An' will you tell us where you're going to get a little block of ice ? An', even if we had done, how could you fasten it down the back of my neck ? Eh ? Can't you answer—where are you going to get a block of ice ?

BARRY : How the hell do I know where I'm going to get it ?

DARRY : D'ye expect me to keep lying here till the winter comes ?

[*During this dialogue* BARRY *is moving round the room aimlessly, peering into drawers, rattling the delf on the dresser with his nose as he looks along the shelves.*]

DARRY (*as he hears the crockery rattling*) : Mind, mind, or you'll break something. I must be losing

a lot of blood, Barry, an' I won't be able to keep my nose sticking up in the air much longer. Can't you find anything ?

BARRY : I can see nothing.

DARRY : Run upstairs 'n get the key of the big shed that's hanging on the wall, somewhere over the mantelpiece at the far end of the room. Go quick, man !

[BARRY *runs upstairs, goes into room, comes out again, and looks down at* DARRY.]

DARRY (*up to him*) : Did you get it ?

BARRY : Where's the switch ? It's as dark as pitch in there.

[DARRY, *with a moan of exasperation, sits up, but immediately plunges down on his back again.*]

DARRY : Starts pumping out again the minute I sit up. (*To* BARRY) There's no switch in the room. We can't have a switch in every corner of the room just to suit you ! You've only got to move down the centre of the room till you come to the fireplace ; then brush your hand over the mantelpiece, along the wall, till you feel the key hanging there.

[BARRY *goes back into the room. After a few second's silence, there is a crash of falling crockery.* DARRY, *after a second of silent consternation, sits up with a jerk, but immediately plunges down on his back again.*] lying on the back

DARRY (*sinking supine on the floor*) : What has he done now; oh, what has he done now ? (*Shouting*

up to BARRY) Eh, you up there—what have you done now?

BARRY (*sticking his head out of door above*) : Nothing much—the washhand-stand fell over.

DARRY (*angrily*) : Nothing much. It sounded a hell of a lot, then. You're the kind of man if you're not chained up, 'll pull everything in the house asundher! Come down, come down, 'n stop down, or that delicate little hand of yours 'll smash everything in the house!

BARRY : My eyes are used to the darkness, now, 'n I can see. I'll get the key for you.

[*He goes back into the room, leaving* DARRY *speechless. After a few seconds, he comes out of the room in a sweet of fright and anger, one hand tightly clasped over the other. He rushes down the stairs, and begins to pull out of the chest of drawers every other moment leaving off to clasp one hand over the other.*]

BARRY (*frantically*) : Get your own key, get your own key. Half slaughtering myself for your sake! Why don't you keep your razor-blades in a safe place, an' not leave them scattered about in heaps all over the mantelpiece? Where is there a bit of old rag till I bind up my wounds? Get your own key yourself, I'm tellin' you.

DARRY : Amn't I nicely handicapped, wanting help an' having only the help of a half-blind man?

BARRY : D'ye know I'm nearly after mowing my fingers off with your blasted razor-blades? (*Com-*

ing near to DARRY, *with a handkerchief in his hand, and showing the injured fingers to him)* Look at them, uh, look at them—one looks as if only a thin thread of flesh was keeping it on. How am I going to play the mandolin now ?

DARRY : You'd play it better if all your fingers were off.

BARRY (*keeping the wounded hand in the air, and holding out the handkerchief to* DARRY *with the other*) : Here, get a grip of this 'n help me to bind up me wounds.

[BARRY *kneels down beside the prostrate* DARRY, *who takes the handkerchief and proceeds to tie it round* BARRY'S *wounded fingers.*]

DARRY (*keeping his nose well up in the air*) : You give that unexpected honour, if you call that a wound!

[DARRY *ties the handkerchief round* BARRY'S *hand, who stands looking at it.*]

BARRY (*reflectively*) : Won't be able to do much for you with it now.

DARRY : It'll limit your capacity for breakin' things.

[*A pause*].

DARRY : Slip out, Barry, old son, 'n see if the heifer's safe on the bank beside the house.

[BARRY *goes outside the door and stands looking up towards the top of the house. The light has been fading, and it is getting dark. Again can be heard the whirr of the mowing machine, and the Town Hall clock strikes ten.*]

BARRY: I think I can hear croppin' the grass all right, but it doesn't seem wise to leave her there 'n the dusk fallin'.

DARRY (*testily*): I can't do anything till this bleeding stops, can I ?

BARRY: The spuds are all scattered about here where you let them fall when you were running in.

DARRY (*moaning*): 'N can't you get the broom 'n sweep them up into a corner, 'n not be trampling them into the ground; you see the state I'm in!

[BARRY *gets the broom and starts to sweep outside the door.*]

BARRY (*into* DARRY): How's it now ?

DARRY (*cautiously sitting up*): It's nearly stopped now, but I'll go cautious.

[BARRY, *sweeping with one hand, manages to bring the broom-handle into contact with the window, and breaks a pane. A silent pause.*]

BARRY (*as if he didn't know*): What's that, what's that ?

DARRY (*in an agony of anger*): What's that, what's that! Can't you see, man, that you're after thrustin' the handle of the broom through one of the windows ?

BARRY (*peering down at the hole in the window*): That's curious now, for I never felt the handle touchin' the window; but there's a hole in it, right enough.

DARRY (*with angry mockery*): No, you wouldn't feel it touchin' it, either. A hole in it—of course

there's a hole in it! My God Almighty, I've a destroyin' angel in the house!

BARRY: Well, not much use of lookin' at it now.

DARRY (*vehemently*): Oh come in, come in, come in, man. Didn't you hear the clock strikin' ten? I'll have to get goin' now.

[*He gets up gingerly, feeling his nose, and still keeping it at a high angle.*]

BARRY (*introducing another subject*): Hadn't you better stable the heifer before you do anything?

DARRY (*violently*): Haven't I to clean out the cow-house first before I stable her, man? With your exercisin', 'n your singin', 'n your great 'n godly gift of expeditin' matters, I haven't made a bit of headway! I hadn't a chance to give her the graze she needs, to let her get all she can on the bank at the back of the house.

BARRY: Supposing she wanders to the edge of the bank 'n tumbles off?

DARRY: I don't know what to do about that.

BARRY: Couldn't you tie her to something?

DARRY (*angrily*): There's nothing to tie her to, man.

BARRY: What about putting a rope down the chimney 'n tying it to something in the room?

DARRY (*after a few second's thought*): That's a good idea, Barry. There's a rope outside, an' I'll sling one end round her neck, let the other end down the chimney, an' tie it to a chair. Wait here a second, 'n get it when it comes down.

[DARRY *rushes out. After a few moments his voice is heard faintly from above calling,* "Hello, hello!" BARRY, *who has his head a little up the chimney, the smoke making him cough, answers,* "Righto, let her come." *The rope comes down;* BARRY *catches the end and pulls it into the room.* DARRY *returns, and they tie the rope to a chair.*]

BARRY: Put the chair at the far end of the room, an' if the heifer wanders too far, we'll see the chair moving across the room.

DARRY (*with enthusiasm*): Now you're beginnin' to use your brains at last, Barry me boy. (*He shifts the chair to the far end of the room.*) Now we can get goin' 'n get everything ship-shape before the missus toddles back. Let's put on the light to see what we're doin'.

[*He snaps down the switch, but no light comes into the bulb.*]

DARRY (*annoyed*): Dih dih dih—must be the meter again.

[*He hurries into the lumber room, stepping over the rope.*]

BARRY (*speaking in to* DARRY): I wouldn't do much tamperin' with that.

DARRY (*inside room—emphatically*): Oh, I know what I'm doin'.

[DARRY *rushes out again, snaps down the switch, but no light comes.*]

DARRY (*irritably*): Must be the blasted bulb. (*He rushes to a drawer.*) There's a bulb here, some-

where, we've had for a long time, 'n never used. (*He takes one from the drawer.*) Here we are. (*He pulls a chair to the centre of the room, stands on it, takes off the old bulb, and gives it to* BARRY.) See if you can see anything wrong with it.

BARRY (*holding it to his nose*) : Can't see anything.

DARRY : Leave it down, leave it down.

BARRY : Sure the one you're fixing's the right voltage.

DARRY (*stopping to look at* BARRY) : Course it's the right voltage. Why wouldn't it be the right voltage ?

BARRY : If it wasn't it might fuse.

DARRY : Fuse. No fear of it fusing. (*He starts to work again.*)

[*The chair to which the rope is tied begins to move across the floor.*]

BARRY (*startled*) : Look out, look out—the heifer's moving !

DARRY : Catch hold of it, catch hold of it, before she disappears up the chimney !

[BARRY *catches the chair, but the strain is too much, and he is pulled along.* DARRY *jumps down off his chair, leaves the bulb on the table, catches hold of the rope, and helps* BARRY *to tug the other chair back to the far end of the room.*]

DARRY : You sit on the chair, 'n then she can't move without our knowledge.

[BARRY *sits on one chair ;* DARRY *mounts the other again, and starts to fix the bulb.* BARRY'S *chairs begins to move with him sitting on it.*]

BARRY (*excitedly*) : Eh, quick again, get down, the heifer's movin' !

[DARRY *jumps down again, and the two of them pull the chair back to the place.*]

DARRY : The missus 'll be back 'n nothing' done but damage.

[*He gets up again and fixes the bulb ; there is a flash, and the room is darker than ever.*]

BARRY (*like a prophet*) : I warned you, Darry ; I saw it comin'.

DARRY (*forcibly*) : What are you blatherin' about ? We're no worse off than we were before we fixed it. There's a drum of oil in the lumber room, 'n if there's any left in it we can light the lamps. You light the one hangin' on the wall, while I see how we stand.

[*He runs into the the lumber room.* BARRY *takes the lamp from the wall, removes the chimney, and tries to light the wick, but he can't see it, and holds the match anywhere but near the wick.* DARRY *comes out of cellar.*]

DARRY (*jubilantly*) : Plenty of oil in it. Aw, you're not holding the match within a mile of the wick, man. Show it to me, show it to me.

[*He takes the match from* BARRY, *and lights the lamp.*]

DARRY : Out with you now, 'n get one of the old lamps you'll find on one of the shelves to the right in the shed at the back of the yard.

BARRY : How'll I see ?

DARRY: Strike a match 'n look. You'll see them staring at you. I'll take a cantful of oil from the drum to put in it when you bring it back, 'n then we'll have lashin's of light.

BARRY (*going out by door*): I know I won't be able to see.

[DARRY, *with a can that has a long snout on it, runs back into the lumber room.* BARRY *has left the door open, and the ratling whirr of the mowing machine can be heard again. There is a slight pause. Suddenly* DARRY *rushes out of the lumber room over to the open door.*]

DARRY (*shouting madly*): Barry, Barry, come here quick, man! I turned the key of the tap too much, 'n it slipped out of me hand into a heap of rubbish, 'n I can't turn off the cock, 'n I can't find the key in the dark. Come quick, man, or there won't be a drop of oil left in the drum!

[*He rushes widly back into the lumber room. Another slight pause. He rushes out again, with the drum in his arms, his thumb pressed to the tap outlet, and runs over to the door.*]

DARRY (*calling madly*): Eh, Barry, Barry, d'ye hear me callin' you, man? I won't be able to keep this oil in much longer. Have you fallen asleep, or what?

[*There is heard outside a rattle, followed by a crash of falling pots, tins and tools; then a dead silence for a moment.*]

DARRY (*staggering against the wall*): Aw, Mother o' God, what's he after doin' now!

BARRY (*outside, in a loud voice of great distress*): Darry, oh Darry, I'm after nearly destryin' meself! Where's the doorway ?—I can't see!

DARRY (*going over and standing in the doorway*): Here, here, man ; no, to the left. (*As* BARRY *staggers in, dusty and frightened*) What ruin are you after causin' now ?

BARRY (*moaningly*): I'm after gettin' an awful shock!

DARRY (*appealingly*): Pull yourself together, for God's sake man, 'n tell us what's happened.

BARRY (*as he sinks down on a chair*): The blasted lamps were on top of the top shelf ; there was nothing to stand on ; I had to climb upon the shelves, and climbing up, the shelves 'n all that was on them came down on top of me.

[DARRY *goes over and rests the drum in the sink, his hand still pressed over the outlet of the tap.*]

DARRY: 'N why did you climb the shelves ? What did you want to do that for ? Couldn't you see, you sap that they weren't fixed well in the wall ? Why did you insist on climbling the shelves ?

BARRY: I was just tryin' to expedite matters.

DARRY (*with a wail*); Tryin' to expedite matters. Oh, there'll be a nice panorama of ruin in front of Lizzie when she comes back!

BARRY: 'N me spectacles were sent flyin' when the shelves fell.

DARRY: 'N why didn't you grab them before they fell to the ground?

BARRY (*hotly*): How could I grab them 'n they fallin', when I was fallin' too!

DARRY (*impatiently*): Well, get the lamp then, 'n look for the lost key in the lumber room.

BARRY: 'N may be let it fall, 'n set the house on fire?

DARRY (*woefully*): Oh amn't I in a nice predic— The chair, the chair—the heifer's movin'!

(*The chair to which the rope is tied begins to move across the floor.* BARRY *catches it, tugs manfully, but he is carried on towards the fireplace.*]

BARRY (*anxiously*): Give us a hand, give us a hand, or I'll be up the chimney!

[DARRY *leaving the drum, runs over to* BARRY'S *side, grips the rope in front of* BARRY, *and, to get a safer hold, takes the rope off the chair and puts it round him under his arms. With great pulling, they get the rope a little back. The oil flows from the drum into the sink unnoticed.*]

DARRY (*panting*): Keep a sthrain, or we'll be up the chimney!

BARRY: How'm I goin' to get home to-night without me spectacles?

DARRY (*loudly*): Keep a sthrain on her, man, keep a sthrain on her; we have to get this straightened out first, before we can brood over your spectacles!

BARRY (*suddenly noticing the oil drum*): The oil, the oil!

[*He lets go of the rope, and runs over to the oil drum.* DARRY *disappears up the chimney.*]

BARRY (*lifting the drum and shaking it*) : Not a drop left in it, not a single drop ! What're we goin' to do 'n—

[*He turns and sees that* DARRY *has disappeared.*]

LIZZIE (*speaking outside in a voice of horror*) : The heifer, the heifer !

DARRY (*calling out*) : Lizzie Lizzie !

[LIZZIE *rushes in as* DARRY *falls down the chimney. He crawls out from the fireplace on his hands and knees, and halts there, exhausted and sooty.*]

LIZZIE (*horrified.*) : What in the Name of God has happened ?

DARRY (*to* LIZZIE) : Now you see the result of having your own way ! Why the hell didn't you hold on to the rope when you took it off the heifer, so that I wouldn't come down with a bump ?

LIZZIE : How'd I know you were hangin' on the other end ?

DARRY (*indignantly*) : You didn't know—my God, woman, can you do nothin' right !

CURTAIN

P. S. LAUGHLIN

A LADY IN A CAGE

CHARACTERS

MISS PINK MISS JONES MR. ROBERTS	*Employees of Messrs Fellowes, Moore, and Hummell*

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR BURGESS

A LADY IN A CAGE

The action of the play takes in an office in Enterprise House, the home of the firm of Fellowes, Moore, and Hummell; an office in which two people work; they are MISS SADIE PINK *and* MISS ELSIE JONES. MISS PINK *is Chief Correspondence Clerk.*

There are two doors in the room, one L., *which must open off-stage and is the way to the general offices, and one up* L.C., *which leads to a corridor or porch beyond which is the office of* MR. FELLOWES, *the Managing Director. The far wall of the corridor is a wood-and-glass screen or partition which can clearly be seen when the door up* L.C. *is open. The partition is wood for about half its height, ground glass up to about eye-level, and clear glass above that. The door to* MR. FELLOWES'S *room is immediately* L. *of the door up* L.C., *outside and at right angles to the back wall so that it forms the end of the corridor. There is an electric bell on the wall immediately above the door up* L.C.

MISS PINK'S *table is* R.C., *so that from her chair she faces down-stage, and* MISS JONES'S *table, which is perhaps not as good as* MISS PINK'S, *is down* L., *close against the wall, so that she faces*

L. A small table with a typewriter on it is down R. Swivel chairs are provided for the typing table and for MISS JONES'S *table. Electric lights in uniformly plain shades hang over the three tables. A window with a heating radiator immediately below it is up from the typewriting table, and a filing cabinet sits in the corner up* R. *A coat-stand on which a lady's coat and hat hang is up* R. C. *The pictures on the walls are large photographs of factory buildings.*

As this room is used for the reception of visitors to the Managing Director a few extra chairs are about ; one of them is immediately L. *of* MISS PINK'S *table.*

The usual paraphernalia of an office are there ; waste-paper baskets, calendars, inkstands, writing and blotting-paper and correspondence trays in one of which, on MISS PINK'S *table, is a telephone directory. The telephone is on* MISS PINK'S *table.*

A small vase of flowers on MISS PINK'S *table gives the only touch of colour to a room which, although drab, is brightly lit, contrasting with the grey, sunless outlook from the window, through which high buildings and factory chimneys can be seen.*

No one is on the stage when the curtain rises. The door L. *is closed, but the door up* L. C., *and beyond it the door to* MR. FELLOWES'S *room, are wide open.* MR. FELLOWES *can be heard speaking, his voice rising and falling as he walks up and down his room ; perhaps his shadow strikes the glass of*

the partition as he gets to the near end of the room and turns. His voice is the voice of a big man who speaks with authority and confidence, almost arrogance.

FELLOWES (*off-stage*)...and I want a reply right away. Tell them I don't want any more excuses. That drying plant was to be ready for use in six months, and they have only just finished the foundations. I want them to explain the delay and tell me where we stand. Say that if I don't get a satisfactory answer without any more nonsense I will have to see whether we are not entitled to cancel the contract. Now this other affair...speak to Mr. Roberts about it. It seems to me there's only one thing we can do, and that is go all out for——

[*A loud report puts an end to* MR FELLOWES'S *speech. It is followed by the sound of a body falling, then silence for five or six seconds.*

[*Slowly a head, the head of* SADIE PINK, *appears at the door of* MR FELLOWES'S *room. She peers round the office before coming through the doorway. She is at least forty-five: a small, prim spinster, plainly but neatly dressed. She looks earnest and mild and quite harmless, and she shows no sign of fright or concern; there is just a glint of impish pleasure in her eyes. She closes both doors up* L.C., *and as she walks to her table with short, quick steps, the large revolver in her hand can be seen. She puts the revolver on her table and, sitting in her chair, she begins to look for a number in the telephone directory. Suddenly*

the telephone rings loudly, momentarily frightening her. She answers it.]

MISS PINK: Hellow...yes, yes, this is Miss Pink...Oh ...oh, I'm sorry, I'm afraid Mr. Fellowes won't be free to see anyone this afternoon. [*Glances at the door up* L.C.] No, I'm afraid not...Well, I'll see later...Oh, no, there would be no good in my asking him now...Yes, good-bye.

[*She puts the telephone down, finds the number she wants in the directory, and lifts the receiver again.*]

Get me *66681, please.*

[*She pulls out the right-hand drawer of her table, puts the revolver in it, and closes it. This is done in a most matter-of-fact way.*]

Hello...... is that the police? Could I speak to Inspector Burgess, please?...Oh, is that Inspector Burgess? This is Fellowes, Moore, and Hummells. (*Louder*) Fellowes, Moore, and Hummells, of Enterprise House, Queen's Avennue...That's right. I...I wonder could not come and see Mr. Fellowes. (*Glances at door up* L. C.) You remember him, don't you Inspector?...Yes, that's good...Oh...oh, he'll be here all the afternoon... Well, I think it would be better if you would wait until you see him, it's...it's a personal metter. Well, no it's not really urgent...now...Yes, this is Miss Pink (*She is rather pleased that the Inspector remembers her.*) Oh, no, thank goodness, we've had nothing like that since...Yes, indeed. Good-bye, Inspector.

[*She puts the telephone down and is sitting staring solemnly at nothing, thinking, when* MISS JONES *comes in* L. MISS JONES *is a rather callous, unimaginative, attractive young woman. She goes to the coat-stand to take off her hat and coat.*]

MISS JONES: Anything exciting ?

MISS PINK (*beginning nervously*) : No...no. Did you have a nice lunch, Miss Jones ?

MISS JONES: Oh, just the usual. Mr. Fellowes hasn't been ringing ?

MISS PINK : No. It's cold out, isn't it ?

MISS JONES : It is, but I like this weather, the streets around here get to messy when it's wet. (*She goes to her table*). Mr. Fellowes in his room ?

MISS PINK : Oh, yes.

[*She watches* MISS JONES *take up her notebook and pencil and turn to go into* MR FELLOWES *room, but says nothing until* MISS JONES *almost has her hand on the door-handle, then she jumps to her feet and takes a few steps up* L. C.]

Oh, Miss Jones, I don't think you should go in.

MISS JONES : But Mr. Fellowes always gives me notes immediately after lunch. He'll be expecting me.

MISS PINK : He...he won't expect you to-day.

MISS JONES : But why...?

MISS PINK : Oh, it's all right. Mr. Fellowes doesn't want to give you any notes to-day.

MISS JONES (*turning down* L.) : In that case, why should I complain ? (MISS PINK *returns to her table*) May be for once I shall get off in time this evening.

(*Sits at her table.*) Have you been in?

[*Nods towards* MR FELLOWES's door.]

MISS PINK: Yes, I...just a little while ago.

MISS JONES: What sort of mood was he in?

MISS PINK: He...he was very quiet. [*Sits.*]

MISS JONES: That's a change for which we should be duly thankful.

[*She begins to sort papers and makes notes.* MISS PINK *starts to write but she is too restless to do any work. After her mind has wandered once or twice she suddenly takes up the telephone.*]

MISS PINK (*speaking on the telephone*): Miss Hardy, you mustn't put any calls through, Mr. Fellowes this afternoon. He is not to be disturbed...I say he must not be disturbed [*She rings off.*]

MISS JONES: This is not like him.

MISS PINK: No, indeed.

MISS JONES: He's not ill! How was he when you were in?

MISS PINK: Well, he didn't look quite himself, I thought.

MISS JONES: Ah, well, I'm sure our Mr. Fellowes knows how to look after Number One.

[*She resumes her work, indifferent to Mr. Fellowes's welfare.*]

MISS PINK: Yes, I suppose, so.

[MISS PINK *cannot settle down to work. Every now and then she lapses into a daydream which ends when she finds her eyes drawn to the door up* L. C. *whereupon she tries again to concentrate.*]

Youve picked up the work here very well. Miss

Jones.

MISS JONES: Oh, there's not much to it.

MISS PINK: Then you 'll be able to get on without me very soon.

MISS JONES: But you're not going!

MISS PINK: You know very well I'm going.

[*She is now calmer than she has been.*]

MISS JONES: But really I——

MISS PINK (*calmly and without malice*): You've come here to learn my work so that you can take my place. I've konwn it all along.

MISS JONES: I...I...but who told you?

MISS PINK: I haven't been told. Selfish people are seldom subtle, and this office is full of selfish people. When you've been a few years watching their antics you can always tell what they're up to

MISS JONES: But why are you to go?

MISS PINK: If I were to ask I'm sure I'd be told that the work is too much for me, that I need a change. It's the usual story.

MISS JONES: But it isn't true, you're well able for the work.

MISS PINK: Mr. Fellowes is the boss. What he says goes...(*She looks towards the door.*)...at least——

MISS JONES: It's tough, certainly.

MISS PINK: Will you like it here?

MISS JONES: Oh, it's all right. Mr Fellowes is a bit of a pig, but I expect I'll manage.

MISS PINK: You'll get used to it.

MISS JONES: It doesn't matter an awful lot whether

I do or not. I don't intend to spend the rest of my life waiting on Mr Fellowes.

MISS PINK (*quietly*) : I said something like that once.

MISS JONES : Why didn't you do something about it...get another job, get married ?

MISS PINK : I was to be married.

MISS JONES : Oh, and what happened ?

MISS PINK : He...he went away.

MISS JONES : I'm sorry.

MISS PINK : When you are young your plans are very real, but as you get older, unless you're very lucky, they seem to drift away like dreams. (*She looks round the room.*) Even the office used to seem...not so bad.

MISS JONES : Do you not think too much about these things ?

MISS PINK : Perhaps I do. (*She rises and goes a few step R. She fidgets nervously with her hands*) Perhaps it's as well I'm going. I've been too long working in this filthy slum, watching the same silly tricks, going through the same dreary routine, effacing myself all day and every day before the same people.

MISS JONES : Oh, Miss Pink !

MISS PINK : Do you read Chesterton ?

[*She is standing by her table.*]

MISS JONES : No, not particularly.

MISS PINK : He wrote a poem about the Wicked Grocer. [*She quotes wistfully.*]

"He keeps a lady in a cage"
Most cruelly all day,

And makes her count and calls her 'Miss'
Until she fades away."

[*She turns to look out the window*]

Those lines used to amuse me.

MISS JONES: Oh, I'd like to go through this place with a gun.

MISS PINK (*turning sharply*): You what?

[*She becomes alert again, her bout of self-pity over*].

MISS JONES: I'd like to take a gun and murder some of the people around here; they're so pompous and so greedy.

MISS PINK (*moves towards her table and, looking at the drawer in which the gun is, she speaks to herself more than to Miss Jones*): You know, that's quite an idea.

MISS JONES: What do you mean?

MISS PINK: Oh, don't mind me.

[*It is* MISS PINK *who first returns to work now, but again she cannot keep it up.* MISS JONES *has no trouble in settling down to read her papers. In a little while* MISS PINK *starts to think; then she turns her attention to the right-hand drawer of her table. Slowly she pulls it out just enough to allow her a peep at the revolver. She looks significantly at* MISS JONES, *who is working away. Suddenly* MISS PINK *shuts the drawer with a bang, pops up, and goes to the typewriter. She uncovers it, inserts a sheet of paper, and pauses again to think. She swivels around on the chair until she is facing* MISS JONES, *who is hard at her work.*]

MISS PINK: Miss Jones...it's silly of me, I know,

but...but the thought just came to my mind. Oh, it's...it's too foolish, but suppose you were to...to go through this place with a gun, as you said just now. I wondered how would Mr. Fellowes come out of it.

MISS JONES : He's a tiresome creature.

MISS PINK : Do you think so ?

MISS JONES : He's so pleased with himself.

MISS PINK : He's been very successful

MISS JONES : Of course, you know him better than I.

MISS PINK (*rises and moves to below her table. She speaks very earnestly*) : Shall I tell you the most un-pleasant experience I know ?

MISS JONES : Yes, do.

MISS PINK (*in an eager, confidential tone*) : Each morning watching Mr Fellowes walking from that door (*Points to door* L.) to that door (*Points to door up* L. C)

MISS JONES : Really !

MISS PINK : He makes walking look such an un-dignified practice ; as if he were annoyed at his Creator for expecting him to make use of a faculty that should have been reserved for the lower classes.

MISS JONES : Miss Pink ! I didn't think you---

MISS PINK : Of course, he can be very kind.

MISS JONES : But he makes such a fuss about it. When he acts like a human being he does it with the air of a man making a sacrifice.

MISS PINK : What about Mr. Moore and...(*turning up* R. *of her table*)...and Mr Roberts ? (MISS JONES

on her guard) Would you shoot him?

MISS JONES: What do you mean.

MISS PINK: Oh, I see. He's a friend of yours.

MISS JONES: Well what's wrong with Mr. Roberts?

[*Door* L. *opens, and* ROBERTS *comes in. He is probably in his early thirties. His manner with the ladies is easy and flippant. He is carrying some papers.*]

ROBERTS: Good afternoon, ladies.

MISS JONES: Hello!

MISS PINK: Good afternoon, Mr. Roberts. We were just talking about you.

ROBERTS: Oh, that's dangerous. You know too much about me, Miss Pink. I hope I haven't been condemned.

MISS PINK: Well we hadn't reached our verdict.

ROBERTS: Good, I came in time. (*Putting some of the papers on* MISS PINK'S *table.*) Something for the Chief Correspondence Clerk; urgent, confidential, and important.

MISS PINK: That probably means it's very difficult.

ROBERTS: To agree that anything is difficult to you, Miss Pink, would be treason against the firm of Fellowes? Moore, and Hummell. (*He turns towards* MISS JONES *and nods towards the door up* L. C.) Is the Rajah in?

MISS JONES: Yes.

ROBERTS: Be good enough to lay these at his feet.

[*Puts the remainder of the papers on her table.*]

MISS JONES: Now?

ROBERTS: At your earliest convenience.

MISS JONES (*standing up*): Very well.

MISS PINK: Oh, no, no. Not now, he's.. not to be disturbed.

ROBERTS: But they could be slipped on his table almost without his noticing.

MISS PINK: No, no not even that.

ROBERTS: Oh, very well. (*To* MISS JONES) I'm sure you won't mind missing the trip.

MISS JONES (*sits*): You bet.

[ROBERTS *sits on the chair* L. *of* MISS PINK'S *table. From there he can admire* MISS JONES, *who likes being admired.*]

ROBERTS: You know, I like coming in here, away from the noise and turmoil that prevails outside. Compared to what we have to stand this could be the...the back door to Heaven.

MISS JONES (*nods towards the door up* L. C.) You mean that door?

ROBERTS (*with mock seriousness*): Ssh! A little respect, MISS JONES.

MISS JONES: More like the morgue.

ROBERTS: Quiet place, the morgue.

MISS JONES: Oh, it's not often so quiet here.

ROBERTS: Here, if the quiet is broken, it is broken by the trumpet-call of authority. Out with us the enemies of peace are less distinguished and more numerous.

MISS JONES: Ours is, of course, a special calling.

ROBERTS: Indeed, it is; one that requires sympathy and tact and oh, so much patience.

MISS JONES: And a certain amount of humility.

ROBERTS: Humility, Miss Jones, is as the breath of life for all who live between the big brass plate which says "Fellowes, Moore, and Hummell," and the threshold of the room which you guard.

MISS JONES: If Mr Fellowes comes through the threshold you'll show a little of it.

[MISS PINK *smiles to herself*.]

ROBERTS (*rising*): He's very quiet.

[ROBERTS *moves towards door up* L. C. MISS PINK *shows fright*]

MISS JONES: Isn't he!

ROBERTS (*open door up* L. C.): This is usually his noisiest time of the day. (*He stands on tiptoe, peeping through the top of the screen into* FELLOWES'S *room.*) He's not there.

MISS PINK (*thoroughly frightened*): Oh, he is.

ROBERTS: I can't see him. He's not at his desk.

MISS JONES: But Miss Pink——

MISS PINK: I was with him just...just before Miss Jones came in.

MISS JONES: He hasn't been out since.

MISS PINK: Oh no, no...he couldn't have.

ROBERTS (*coming from the door, which he closes, to down* L. C.): Perhaps he's on his knees saying a few prayers; asking forgiveness for the way he has treated me for the past ten years.

MISS JONES: May be——(*suddenly looking alarmed.*) You don't think—— [*She stands up.*]

ROBERTS: Don't alarm yourself, Miss Jones. When you're a little longer here you will learn

never to question why occasionally you get the gift of a little leisure. You will take it and rejoice and not worry abo.t the cause.

MISS JONES: Silly!

ROBERTS: Whether it's an office event the death of a politician, or even the ending of a war, to you it's just a day off, or just an hour or two of peace.

MISS JONES: But if he's very ill?

ROBERTS: He's got a telephone to call his doctor and a bell to summon his staff. He may be dead—

MISS PINK (*shocked*): Mr. Roberts!

ROBERTS: No fear of that. But what if he is dead? His orders are that he is not to be disturbed, and when Mr. Fellowes says "No admittance" I wouldn't go in there to check on his death if all the blinds were down and a stream of blood was flowing out under the door.

MISS PINK: You shouldn't say things like that.

[*She has a sidelong peep at the bottom of the door up* L. C., *just to be sure*.]

ROBERTS: I'm sorry, ladies. I shouldn't make fun of your charge.

MISS PINK: You know he thinks very highly of you.

MISS JONES: They call you "Mr. Fellowes's seventh sense."

ROBERTS: Let me catch them.

MISS PINK: But Mr. Fellowes relies a great deal on you. He never decides anything without letting you know.

ROBERTS (*pleased*): Well, I suppose I have my uses.

MISS JONES: And why not?

MISS PINK: Yes, indeed. Mr. Fellowes can't carry everything in his head; I don't believe he knows the names of all his employees. I know neither Mr. Moore nor Mr. Hummell does.

ROBERTS: That's just it, Miss Pink. Mr. Moore and Mr. Hummell have their own special interests, and from his semi-datached sanctum here Mr. Fellowes can't see everything that goes on outside. It's not like the old days when he could get about better than he can now.

MISS JONES: He gets about enough.

ROBERTS: Oh, he's not the man he was. He's got to depend more on others, and I, being a sociable sort of chap, know every one; I can't help knowing a good deal about the place.

MISS JONES: Part of your job, isn't it?

MISS PINK (*naively*): Mr. Fellowes never employs or discharges anyone without consulting you, does he, Mr. Roberts?

ROBERTS: I suppose there's something——

MISS JONES (*realizing that* ROBERTS *is giving* MISS PINK *the information she wants*): If he comes out he'll have something to say to all of us.

ROBERTS: Better not tempt him. I must go back to the outer darkness. [*He goes out* L.]

MISS JONES (*nettled*): What have you against Mr. Roberts?

MISS PINK: Did I say anything against him?

MISS JONES: You think he had something to do with my coming in here.

MISS PINK: He's a friend of yours, isn't he?

MISS JONES: Well, what if he is?

MISS PINK (*wearily*): Oh, don't mind me, Miss Jones, I'm a bit unsettled to-day. (*She goes over to the window. She speaks with rising emotion.*) I've been twenty-five years coming and going through these dreary streets, twenty-five years listening to Mr. Fellowes and Mr. Moore and Mr. Hummell and the rest of them; watching their schemes, their greedy, crafty antics, working day in, day out, in an atmosphere of intrigue and jealousy and corruption and selfishness and treachery.

MISS JONES (*rising*): Miss Pink, are you all right?

[*She moves to* L.C.]

MISS PINK: Once I was interested in just as many things as you are. As you get older the other things fall away until nothing is left but your work. (*She turns and takes a few steps towards* MISS JONES) It's a bad thing for a woman to live only for a career.

MISS JONES: But you have other things. (MISS PINK *shakes her head.*) You...you like the country. Aren't your people there?

MISS PINK (*R. of her table*): I was brought up on a farm. For years I spent every moment I could in the country. Now they're all gone, and when I go to the country I'm just another visitor from the city. [*She moves towards the window again.*]

MISS JONES: I'm sorry.

MISS PINK: From this window I used to be able to

see fields, miles away; white cottages and trees, and on a bright day I could see the children playing by the stream. In spring I could see the white hawthorn blossoms in the hedges. For years I clung to that scene as to the memory of my youth. (MISS JONES *goes over quietly and stands above and* L. *of* MISS PINK. *They are both looking out the window*). But Mr. Moore's advertising campaign had to have new hoardings there. Then Mr. Hummell put up that unsightly garage.

MISS JONES: Pretty awful, isn't it?

MISS PINK: Now Mr. Fellowes's new drying plant is going up. More dirty windows and smoking chimneys and greyness and ugliness. (*She goes to her desk and sits down.*) I feel as if I were going down into a deep pit that gets darker and colder as the sky gets smaller and goes farther away.

MISS JONES (*alarmed*): Miss Pink!

[ROBERTS *comes in* L., *with* DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR BURGESS, *a middle-aged, hearty, talkative man.*]

BURGESS: Gentleman to see you, Miss Pink. I found him straying outside.

BURGESS (*crossing to* C.): Hello, Miss Pink, remember me? [ROBERTS *is down* L.]

MISS PINK (*nervously*): Oh...oh, yes...Inspector Burgess. (*She rises.*) How are you, Inspector?

BURGESS: Aha! In the pink, Miss Pink.

MISS PINK: Won't you sit down?

BURGESS: Thanks (*He sits* L. *of* MISS PINK's *table, He nods towards door up* L. C.) Boss tied up?

MISS PINK: Well...I'll take you in in a moment.

BURGESS: Good enough (*Takes out pipe and matches.*) Well, how are things? Must be six or seven years since I had that little bit of business here. [*Starts to light his pipe.*]

MISS PINK: Yes, it must be. Do you know Mr. Roberts?

BURGESS: I'll say I do. Makings of a great detective, Mr. Roberts Many a time I've told Mr. Fellowes that. What was the name of that bloke we landed here?

ROBERTS: Allen, Geoffrey Allen.

BURGESS (*to* ROBERTS): You're the man who caught him. I would never have finished the case only for you; you were on his heels every move. By Jove. Mr. Fellowes won't forget that bit of excitement until the day he dies. Awkward, you know, having a chap who can't keep his own money and the firm's money apart.

MISS PINK (*indicating* MISS JONES): This is Miss Jones, Inspector.

BURGESS: How d'ye do. You weren't here when we found the cuckoo in the nest.

[MISS PINK, *who has been getting more and more ill at ease since the arrival of* BURGESS, *is now over at the filing cabinet, ostensibly looking for some papers. Whilst the others talk it is clear from her looks and gestures that her search is only a pretence to hide her agitation.*]

MISS JONES: I'm afraid that was before my time.

BURGESS: Keep your fingers crossed, Miss Jones, you never know what might happen in a place like this.

[MISS PINK *starts. She begins to search very earnestly in one of the drawers of the cabinet.*]

ROBERTS: And what are you up to these days, Inspector?

BURGESS: Murder. There's got to be a body now before I'm interested.

[MISS PINK *pauses to give a sidelong glance at door up* L. C.]

MISS JONES: I hope you're not looking for one here.

BURGESS: We get them in all sorts of places.

MISS JONES: How unpleasant!

BURGESS: Oh, you get used to it. It's not nice seeing some one who's been strangled or poisoned or drowned, but I wouldn't miss seeing a bloke who's been shot. Some of them look damned silly.

[MISS PINK *is now very busy. She pulls out a second drawer of the cabinet and feverishly fingers through the papers in it.*]

ROBERTS: D'you mean their expression?

BURGESS: Expression, situation, position, everything.

ROBERTS: I say.

BURGESS: We'd a very funny case only last month; the Beige Bedroom Case, they called it. Wife put a bullet in her old man just as he was changing his trousers, and over he went on his nose. You should have seen the shape of him. (BURGESS *smokes his pipe and smiles at the thought of it.* MISS PINK

pauses in her search, hert houghts in the back room.)

He went in for long——

[*He remembers that there are ladies present, and with a suitable gesture he shows* ROBERTS *that he is referring to drawers.*]

ROBERTS: A careful type.

BURGESS: Wool to the heels.

MISS JONES: Oh, Inspector!

BURGESS: All very well. Nothing is unimportant in this job. Pointer number one, incompetent wife ...plain as a pikestaff the minute I went in the door. She couldn't darn. (*He closes his eyes and shakes his head, a look of disgust on his face.*) Shocking sight, shocking sight.

ROBERTS: You haven't changed a bit, Inspector.

BURGESS: No good letting things get you down.

MISS JONES: But isn't your work dangerous.

BURGESS: Only sometimes. Funny thing, you know, most murders are committed by quiet, harmless-looking people, people who never said a cross word to anyone. Now if there were to be a murder in this place I wouldn't pick on any of the sour battle-axes you have around here. I'd look for some one quiet and timid. (*He turns to* MISS PINK, *who has been coming forward, interested.*) Some one like you, Miss Pink

MISS PINK (*frightened*): Oh...oh...I...really...

ROBERTS: Oh, I say, Inspector, have a heart!

BURGESS: Sorry, Miss Pink. I shouldn't talk so much shop. You're the last one I'd——

MISS PINK (*sweetly*): Oh, that's all right.

ROBERTS: Are you here on business, or is that not a fair question?

BURGESS: Ask Miss Pink—she sent for me.

MISS PINK: Oh, it's Mr. Fellowes......something personal.

ROBERTS: We don't want another Allen case.

BURGESS: I don't know about that, it was a very interesting case. Why should you complain, anyway—didn't you get his job?

ROBERTS: Well, some one had to get it.

BURGESS: Certainly. Wasn't your fault that he made a fool of himself.

MISS JONES: What happened to him?

BURGESS: He got five years.

ROBERTS: He hasn't been heard of since. He must have cleared out of the country when he go out.

MISS PINK (*with an effort*): I...I suppose there was no doubt that Geoff - that Mr. Allen was guilty.

BURGESS: Ha! Not a chance.

MISS JONES: Why, you don't doubt it, Miss Pink, do you?

MISS PINK: Well...you know...I...I just wondered.

ROBERTS: Of course, Miss Pink knew Allen very well. (*They all look at* MISS PINK, *who, looking more frightened than ever, sits down at her desk.*) You know, Miss Pink, I used to think Allen had a crush on you.

BURGESS: Is that so? By Jove, Miss Pink, you had a lucky escape.

MISS PINK: I...I suppose so.

[*A moment's silence.* MISS JONES *is staring hard at* MISS PINK.]

BURGESS (*looks at his watch*): D'you think Mr. Fellowes will soon be free?

MISS PINK: I...I'm not sure whether you can go in yet...I'll——(ROBERTS *turns to go.* MISS PINK *rises.*) Oh, don't go yet, Mr. Roberts. I'll just see if Mr. Fellowes is ready.

[MISS PINK *opens the door up* L.C. *She pauses at the inner door and then, hesitantly and very timidly, she knocks. She turns the handle very slowly and gives the door a slight push, causing it to swing open. She stands for a moment, uncertain of her next move, and then she makes up her mind not to go in. She comes down-stage.*]

Will you go in, Inspector.

BURGESS: Right-ho. (*rises.*) Well, so-long for the present, Mr. Roberts. Give me a call if you've any murders on your hands.

ROBERTS: Sure, Inspector. I'll have no one but you at mine.

BURGESS: I'll bet you say that to all the police.

ROBERTS: You'll tidy me up, I hope.

BURGESS: Aha, fair enough.

[BURGESS *goes into* MR. FELLOWES'S *room.* ROBERTS *turns to go.*]

(*Off-stage*). Good God!

[ROBERTS, *startled, goes in.*]

ROBERTS (*off-stage*): Oh, this is——

BURGESS (*off-stage*): Don't touch anything. Come

over here, will you?

MISS JONES (*who is down* R.C.): What is it? What's wrong?

MISS PINK (*up* L.C.): Why not go in and see?

[MISS JONES *crosses up and goes in. Immediately she screams.*]

ROBERTS (*off*): This is terrible.

MISS JONES (*off*): It's horrible...horrible. (*She continues crying*)

ROBERTS (*off*): Wait—let me help you.

[MISS PINK, *who has been standing up* L.C. *quite unmoved, goes to her table, takes a key from the inkstand, returns to the door of* MR FELLOWES'S *room and locks it, shutting out* MISS JONES'S *cries and* ROBERTS'S *words of comfort. She closes door up* L.C., *crosses back to her table, and takes up the telephone.*]

MISS PINK (*on 'phone*): Will you please ask both Mr. Moore and Mr. Hummell to come down, at once, to see Mr Fellowes...Yes, both of them, immediately.

[*She puts down the telephone, pauses for a moment, smiles, then she opens her drawer slowly and takes out the revolver. She examines it, her eyes lighting up, her smile crazy. Balancing the revolver in businesslike way, she move up* R.C., *facing the door* L. *through which* MR. MOORE *and* MR. HUMMELL *must come.*]

[*She gives her sleeve a tug and takes aim as the door* L. *is pulled open, and the* CURTAIN *falls. As the curtains meet, the shooting begins.*]

A. A. MILNE

THE BOY COMES HOME

A Comedy

CHARACTERS

Uncle James

Aunt Emily

Philip

Mary

Mrs. Higgins

THE BOY COMES HOME

SCENE: *A room in* UNCLE JAMES'S *house in the Cromwell Road.*

TIME: *The day after the War.*

Any room in UNCLE JAMES'S *house is furnished in heavy mid-Victorian style; this particular morning-room is perhaps solider and more respectable even than the others, from the heavy table in the middle of it to the heavy engravings on the walls. There are two doors to it. The one at the back opens into the hall, the one at the side into dining-room.*

PHILIP *comes in from the hall and goes into the dinning-room. Apparently he finds nothing there, for he returns to the morning-room, looks about him for a moment and then rings the bell. It is ten o'clock and he wants his breakfast. He picks up the paper, and sits in a heavy armchair in front of the fire—a pleasant-looking well-built person of twenty-three, with an air of decisivness about him.* MARY, *the parlour-maid, comes in.*

MARY: Did you ring, Master Philip?

PHILIP (*absently*): Yes; I want some breakfast, please, Mary.

MARY (*coldly*): Breakfast has been cleared away an hour ago.

PHILIP: Exactly. That's why I rang. You can boil me a couple of eggs or something. And coffee, not tea.

MARY: I'm sure I don't know what Mrs. Higgins will say?

PHILIP (*getteng up*): Who is Mrs. Higgins?

MARY: The cook. And she's not used to being put about like this.

PHILIP: Do you think she'll say something?

MARY: I do not know *what* she'll say.

PHILIP: You needn't tell me, you know, if you don't want to. Anyway, I don't suppose it will shock me. One gets used to it in the Army.

[*He smiles pleasantly at her.*]

MARY: Well, I'll do what I can, sir. But breakfast at eight sharp is the master's rule, just as it used to be before you went away to the war.

PHILIP: Before I went away to the war I did a lot of silly things, Don't drag them up now. (*More curtly*) Two eggs, and if there's a ham bring that along too.

[*He turns away.*]

MARY (*doubtfully, as she prepares to go*): Well I'm sure I don't know what Mrs. Higgins will say.

[*Exit* MARY.]

[*As she goes out she makes way for* AUNT EMILY *to come in, a kind-hearted mid-Victorian lady who has never had any desire for the vote.*]

EMILY: *There* you are, Philip! Good morning, dear. Did you sleep well?

PHILIP: Rather: splendidly, thanks, Aunt Emily. How are you?
[*He kisses her.*]

EMILY: And did you have a good breakfast? Naughty boy to be late for it. I always thought they had to get up so early in the Army.

PHILIP: They do. That's why they're so late when they get out of the Army.

EMILY: Dear me! I should have thought a habit of four years would have stayed with you.

PHILIP: Every morning for four years, as I've shot out of bed, I've said to myself, "Wait! A time will come." (*Smiling*) That doesn't really give a habit a chance.

EMILY: Well, I daresay you wanted your sleep out. I was so afraid that a really cosy bed would keep you awake after all those years in the trenches.

PHILIP: Well, one isn't in the trenches all the time. And one gets leave—if one's an officer.

EMILY (*reproachfully*): You didn't spend much of it with *us* Philip.

PHILIP (*taking her hands*): I know; but you did understand, didn't you, dear?

EMILY: We're not very gay, and I know you must have wanted gaiety for the little time you had. But I think your Uncle James felt it. After all, dear, you've lived with us for some years, and he *is* your guardian.

PHILIP: I know. *You've* been a darling to me

always, Aunt Emily But (*awkwardly*) Uncle James and I——

EMILY : Of course, he is a *little* difficult to get on with. I'm more used to him. But I'm sure he really is very found of you, Philip.

PHILIP : H'm ! I always used to be frightened of him...I suppose he's just the same. He seemed just the same last night—and he still has breakfast at eight o'clock. Been making pots of money, I suppose ?

EMILY : He never tells me exactly, but he did speak once about the absurdity of the excess-profits tax. You see jam is a thing the Army wants.

PHILIP : It certainly gets it.

EMILY : It was so nice for him, because it made him feel he was doing his bit helping the poor men in the trenches.

[*Enter* MARY.]

MARY : Mrs. Higgins wishes to speak to you, ma'am.

[*She looks at* PHILIP *as much as to say.* "*There you are !*"]

EMILY (*getting up*) : Yes, I'll come. (*To* PHILIP) I think I'd better just see what she wants, Philip.

PHILIP (*firmly to* MARY) : Tell Mrs. Higgins to come here, (MARY *hesitates and looks at her mistress,*) At once, please.

[*Exit* MARY,]

EMILY (*upset*) : Philip, dear, I don't know what Mrs. Higgins will say——

PHILIP: No; nobody seems to. I thought we might really find out for once.

EMILY (*going towards the door*): Perhaps I'd better go——

PHILIP (*putting his arm round her waist*): Oh no, you mustn't. You see, she really wants to see *me*.

EMILY: you?

PHILIP: Yes; I ordered breakfast five minutes ago.

EMILY: Philip! My poor boy! Why didn't you tell me? and I daresay I could have got it for you. Though I don't know what Mrs. Higgins——

[*An extremely angry voice is heard outside, and* MRS. HIGGINS, *stout and aggressive, comes in.*]

MRS. HIGGINS (*truculently*): You sent for me, ma'am?

EMILY (*nervously*): Yes—er—I think if you—perhaps——

PHILIP (*calmly*): I sent for you, Mrs. Higgins. I want some breakfast. Didn't Mary tell you?

MRS. HIGGINS: Breakfast is eight o'clock. It always has been as long as I've been in this house, and always will be until I get further orders.

PHILIP: Well, you've just got further orders. Two eggs, and if there's a ham——

MRS. HIGGINS: Orders. We're talking about orders. From whom in this house do I take orders may I ask?

PHILIP: In this case from me.

MRS. HIGGINS (*playing her trump-card*): In that case, ma'am, I wish to give a month's notice from to day. *In* culsive.

PHILIP (*quickly, before his aunt can say anything*): Certainly. In fact; you'd probably prefer it if my aunt gave *you* notice, and then you could go at once. We can easily arrange that. (*To* AUNT EMILY *as he takes out a fountain-pen and cheque-book*). What do you pay her ?

EMILY (*faintly*): Forty-five pounds.

PHILIP (*writing on his knee*): Twelve into forty-five...(*pleasantly to* MRS. HIGGINS, *but without looking up*) I hope you don't mind a Cox's cheque. Some people do ; but this is quite a good one. (*Tearing it out*) Here you are.

MRS. HIGGINS (*taken aback*): What's this ?

PHILIP: Your wages instead of notice. Now you can go at once.

MRS. HIGGINS: Who said anything about going ?

PHILIP (*surprised*): I'm sorry ; I thought *you* did.

MRS. HIGGINS: If it's only a bit of breakfast, I don't say but what I mightn't get it, if I'm asked decent.

PHILIP (*putting back the cheque*): Then let me say again, "Two eggs, ham and coffee," And Mary can bring the ham up at once, and I'll get going on that. (*Turning away*) Thanks very much.

MRS. HIGGINS: Well, I—well—well !

[*Exit speechless.*]

PHILIP (*surprised*): Is that all she ever says ? It isn't much to worry about.

EMILY: Philip, how could you ! I should have been terrified.

PHILIP: Well, you see. I've done your job for two years out there.

EMILY: What job?

PHILIP: Mess President...I think I'll go and see about that ham.

[*He smiles at her and goes out into the dining-room.* AUNT EMILY *wanders round the room, putting a few things tidy as is her habit, when she is interrupted by the enterance of* UNCLE JAMES. JAMES *is not a big man, nor an impressive one in his black morning-coat; and his thin strangly beard, now going grey, does not hide a chin of any great power; but he has a severity which passes for strength with the weak.*]

JAMES: Philip down yet?

EMILY: He's just having his breakfast.

JAMES (*looking at his watch*): Ten o'clock. (*Snapping it shut and putting it back*) Ten o'clock. I say ten o'clock, Emily.

EMILY: Yes, dear, I heard you.

JAMES: You don't say anything?

EMILY (*vaguely*): I expect he's tired after that long war.

JAMES: That's no excuse for not being punctual. I suppose he learnt punctuality in the Army?

EMILY: I expect he learent it, James, but I understood him to say that he'd forgotten it.

JAMES: Then the sooner he learns it again the better. I particularly stayed away from the office to-day in order to talk things over with him, and (*looking at his watch*) here's ten o'clock—past ten—

—and no sign of him. I'm practically throwing away a day.

EMILY: What are you going to talk to him about?

JAMES: His future, naturally. I have decided that the best thing he can do is to come into the business at once.

EMILY: Are you really going to talk it over with him, James, or are you just going to tell him that he *must* come?

JAMES (*surprised*): What do you mean? What's the difference? Naturally we shall talk it over first, and—er—naturally he'll fall in with my wishes.

EMILY: I suppose he can hardly help himself, poor boy.

JAMES: Not until he's twenty-five, anyhow. When he's twentyfive he can have his own money and do what he likes with it.

EMILY (*timidly*): But I think you ought to consult him a little, dear. After all, he *has* been fighting for us.

JAMES (*with his back to the fire*): No, that's the sort of silly sentiment that there's been much too much of. I object to it strongly. I don't want to boast, but I think I may claim to have done my share. I gave up my nephew to my country, and I—er—suffered from the shortage of potatoes to an extent that you probably didn't realise. Indeed, if it hadn't been for your fortunate discovery about that time that you didn't really like potatoes, I don't known how we should have carried on. And as I think I've told you before, the excess-profits

tax seemed to me a singularly stupid piece of legislation--but I paid it. And I don't go boasting about how much I paid.

EMILY (*unconvinced*): Well, I think that Philip's four years out there have made him more of a man; he doesn't seem somehow like a boy who can be told what to do. I'm sure they've taught him something.

JAMES: I've no doubt that they've taught him something about—er—bombs and—er—which end a revolver goes off, and how to form fours. But I don't see that that sort of thing helps him to decide upon the most suitable career for a young man in after-war conditions.

EMILY: Well, I can only say you'll find him different.

JAMES: I didn't notice any particular difference last night.

EMILY: I think you'll find him rather more—I can't quite think of the word, but Mrs. Higgins could tell you what I mean.

JAMES: Of course, if he likes to earn his living any other way, he may; but I don't see how he proposes to do it so long as I hold the purse-strings. (*Looking at his watch*) Perhaps you'd better tell him that I cannot wait any longer.

[EMILY *opens the door leading to the dining-room and talks through it to* PHILIP.]

EMILY: Philip, your uncle is waiting to see you before he goes to the office. Will you be long, dear?

PHILIP (*from the dining-room*) : Is he in a hurry ?

JAMES (*shortly*) : Yes.

EMILY : He says he *is* rather, dear.

PHILIP : Couldn't he come and talk in here ? It wouldn't interfere with my breakfast.

JAMES : No.

EMILY : He says he'd rather you came to *him*, darling.

PHILIP (*resigned*) : Oh, well.

EMILY (*to* JAMES) : He'll be here directly, dear. Just sit down in front of the fire and make yourself comfortable with the paper. He won't keep you long.

[*She arranges him*]

JAMES (*taking the paper*) : The morning is not the time to make oneself comfortable. It's a most dangerous habit. I nearly found myself dropping off in front of the fire just now. I don't like this hanging about, wasting the day.

[*He opens the paper*]

EMILY : You should have had a nice sleep, dear, while you could. We were up so late last night listening to Philip's stories.

JAMES : Yes, yes. (*He begins a yawn and stifles it hurriedly.*) You mustn't neglect your duties, Emily. I've no doubt you have plenty to do.

EMILY : All right, James, then I'll leave you. But don't be hard on the boy.

JAMES (*sleepily*) : I shall be just, Emily ; you can rely upon that.

EMILY (*going to the door*) : I don't think that's quite what I meant.

[*She goes out.*]

[JAMES, *who is now quite comfortable, begins to nod. He wakes up with a start, turns over the paper, and nods again. Soon he is breathing deeply with closed eyes.*]

* * *

PHILIP (*coming in*) : Sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was a bit late for breakfast. (*He takes out his pipe.*) Are we going to talk business or what ?

JAMES (*taking out his watch*) : A *bit* late ! I make it just two hours.

PHILIP (*pleasantly*) : All right, Uncle James. Call it two hours late. Or twently-two hourse early for to-morrow's breakfast, if you like.

[*He sits down in a chair on the opposite side of the table from his uncle, and lights his pipe.*]

JAMES : You smoke now ?

PHILIP (*staggered*) : I what ?

JAMES (*nodding at his pipe*) : You smoke ?

PHILIP : Good heavens ! what do you think we *did* in France ?

JAMES : Before you start smoking all over the house, I should have thought you would have asked your aunt's permission.

[PHILIP *looks at him in amazement, and then goes to the door.*]

PHILIP (*calling*) : Aunt Emily !...Aunt Emily !...Do you mind my smoking in here ?

AUNT EMILY (*from upstairs*): Of course not, darling.

PHILIP (*to* JAMES, *as he returns to his chair*): Of course not, darling.

[*He puts back his pipe in his mouth*]

JAMES: Now, understand once and for all, Philip, while you remain in my house I expect not only punctuality, but also civility and respect. I will *not* have impertinence.

PHILIP (*unimpressed*): Well, that's what I want to talk to you about Uncle James. About staying in your house, I mean.

JAMES: I don't know what you do mean.

PHILIP: Well, we don't get on too well together, and I thought perhaps I'd better take rooms somewhere. You could give me an allowance until I came into my money. Or I suppose you could give me the money now if you really liked. I don't quite know how father left it to me.

JAMES (*coldly*): You come into your money when you are twenty-five. Your father very wisely felt that to trust a large sum to a mere boy of twenty-one was simply putting temptation in his way. Whether I have the power or not to alter his dispositions, I certainly don't propose to do so.

PHILIP: If it comes to that, I *am* twenty-five.

JAMES: Indeed? I had an impression that that event took place in about two years' time. When did you become twenty-five, may I ask?

PHILIP (*quietly*): It was on the Somme. We were attacking the next day and my company was in

support. We were in a so-called trench on the edge of a wood—a damned rotten place to be, and we got hell. The company commander sent back to ask if we could move. The C.O. said, "Certainly not; hang on." We hung on; doing nothing, you know—just hanging on and waiting for the next day. Of course, the Boche knew all about that. He had it on us nicely...(*Sadly*) Poor old Billy! he was one of the best—our company commander, you know. They got him, poor devil! That left *me* in command of the company. I sent a runner back to ask if I could move. Well, I'd had a bit of a scout on my own and found a sort of trench five hundred yards to the right. Not what *you'd* call a trench, of course, but compared to that wood—well, it was absolutely Hyde Park. I described the position and asked if I could go there. My man never came back. I waited an hour and sent another man. He went west too. Well, I wasn't going to send a third. It was murder. So I had to decide. We'd lost about half the company by this time, you see. Well, there were three things I could do—hang on, move to this other trench, against orders, or go back myself and explain the situation...I moved...And then I went back to the C.O. and told him I'd moved...And then I went back to the company again...(*Quietly*) That was when I became twenty-five...or thirty-five...or forty-five.

JAMES (*recovering himself with an effort*): Ah, yes, yes. (*He coughs awkwardly*) No doubt points

like that frequently crop up in the trenches. I am glad that you did well out there, and I'm sure your Colonel would speak kindly of you; but when it comes to choosing a career for you now that you have left the army, my advice is not altogether to be despised. Your father evidently thought so, or he would not have entrusted you to my care.

PHILIP: My father didn't foresee this war.

JAMES: Yes, yes, but you make too much of this war. All you young boys seem to think you've come back from France to teach us our business. You'll find that it is you who'll have to learn, not we.

PHILIP: I'm quite prepared to learn; in fact, I want to.

JAMES: Excellent. Then we can consider that settled.

PHILIP: Well, we haven't settled yet what business I'm going to learn.

JAMES: I don't think that's very difficult. I propose to take you into my business. You'll start at the bottom, of course, but it will be a splendid opening for you.

PHILIP *(thoughtfully)*: I see. So you've decided it for me? The jam business.

JAMES *(sharply)*: Is there anything to be ashamed of in that?

PHILIP: Oh no, nothing at all. Only it doesn't happen to appeal to me.

JAMES: If you knew which side your bread was

buttered, it would appeal to you very considerably.

PHILIP : I'm afraid I can't see the butter for the jam.

JAMES : I don't want any silly jokes of that sort. You were glad enough to get it out there, I've no doubt.

PHILIP : Oh yes. Perhaps that's why I'm so sick of it now...No, it's no good, Uucle James ; you must think of something else.

JAMES (*with a sneer*): Perhaps *you've* thought of something else ?

PHILIP : Well, I had some idea of being an architect——

JAMES : You propose to start learning to be an architect at twenty-three ?.

PHILIP (*smiling*): Well, I couldn't start before, could I ?

JAMES : Exactly. And now you'll find it's too late.

PHILIP : Is it ? Aren't there going to be any more architects, or doctors, or solicitors, or barristers ? Because we've all lost four years of our lives, are all the professions going to die out ?

JAMES : And how old do you suppose you'll be before you're earning money as an architect ?

PHILIP : The usual time, whatever that may be. If I'm four years behind, so is everybody else.

JAMES : Well, I think it's high time you began to earn a living at once.

PHILIP : Look here, Uncle James, do you really think that you can treat me like a boy who's just

left school? Do you think four years at the front have made no difference at all.

JAMES: If there had been any difference, I should have expected it to take the form of an increased readiness to obey orders and recognise authority.

PHILIP (*regretfully*): You are evidently determined to have a row. Perhaps I had better tell you once and for all that I refuse to go into the turnip and vegetable marrow business.

JAMES (*thumping the table angrily*): And perhaps I'd better tell *you*, once and for all, that I don't propose to allow rudeness from an impertinent young puppy.

PHILIP (*reminiscently*): I remember annoying our Brigadier once. He was covered with red, had a very red face, about twenty medals, and a cold blue eye. He told me how angry he was for about five minutes while I stood to attention. I'm afraid you aren't nearly so impressive, Uncle James.

JAMES (*rather upset*): Oh! (*Recovering himself*) Fortunately I have other means of impressing you. The power of the purse goes a long way in this world I propose to use it.

PHILIP: I see...Yes...that's rather awkward, isn't it?

JAMES (*pleasantly*): I think you'll find it very awkward.

PHILIP (*thoughtfully*): Yes.

[*With an amused laugh* JAMES *settles down to his paper as if the interview were over.*]

PHILIP (*to himself*): I suppose I shall have to think of another argument.

[*He takes out a revolver from his pocket and fondles it affectionately*]

JAMES (*looking up suddenly as he is doing this—amazed*): What on earth are you doing ?

PHILIP: Souvenir from France Do you know, Uncle James, that this revolver has killed about twenty Germans ?

JAMES (*shortly*): Oh ! Well, don't go playing about with it here, or you'll be killing Englishmen before you know where you are.

PHILIP: Well, you never know. (*He raises it leisurely and points it at his uncle.*) It's a nice little weapon.

JAMES (*angrily*): Put it down, sir. You ought to have grown out of monkey tricks like that in the Army. You ought to know better than to point an unloaded revolver at anybody. That's the way accidents always happen.

PHILIP: Not when you've been on a revolver course and know all about it. Besides, it *is* loaded.

JAMES (*very angry because he is frightened suddenly*): Put it down at once, sir. (PHILIP *turns it away from him and examines it carelessly.*) What is the matter with you ? Have you gone mad suddenly ?

PHILIP (*mildly*): I thought you'd be interested in it. It's shot such a lot of Germans.

JAMES: Well, it won't want to shoot any more, and the sooner you get rid of it the better.

PHILIP: I wonder. Does it ever occur to you,

Uncle James, that there are about a hundred thousand people in England who own revolvers, who are quite accustomed to them and—who have nobody to practise on now ?

JAMES : No, sir, it certainly doesn't.

PHILIP (*thoughtfully*) : I wonder if it will make any difference You know, one gets so used to potting at people. It's rather difficult to realise suddenly that one oughtn't to.

JAMES (*getting up*) : I don't know what the object of all this tomfoolery is, if it has one. But you understand that I expect you to come to the office with me to-morrow at nine o'clock. Kindly see that you're punctual.

[*He turns to go away*]

PHILIP (*softly*) : Uncle James.

JAMES (*over his shoulder*) : I have no more——

PHILIP (*in his parade voice*) : Damn it, sir! stand to attention when you talk to an officer ! (JAMES *instinctively turns round and stiffens himself.*) That's better ; you can sit down if you like.

[*He motions* JAMES *to his chair with the revolver.*]

JAMES (*going nervously to his chair*) : What does this bluff mean ?

PHILIP : It isn't bluff, it's quite serious. (*Pointing the revolver at his uncle.*) Do sit down.

JAMES (*sitting down*) : threats, eh ?

PHILIP : Persuasion.

JAMES : At the point of the revolver ? You settle your arguments by force ? Good heavens, sir ! this

is just the very thing that we were fighting to put down.

PHILIP: *We* were fighting! *We*! *We*! Uncle, you're a humorist.

JAMES: Well, "you," if you prefer it. Although those of us who stayed at home——

PHILIP: Yes, never mind about the excess profits now. I can tell you quite well what we fought for. We used force to put down force. That's what I'm doing now. You were going to use force —the force of money—to make me do what you wanted. Now I'm using force to stop it.

[*He levels the revolver again*.]

JAMES: You're—you're going to shoot your old uncle?

PHILIP: Why not? I've shot lots of old uncles—Land sturmers.

JAMES: But those were Germans! It's different shooting Germans. You're in England now. You couldn't have a crime on your conscience like that.

PHILIP: Ah, but you mustn't think that after four years of war one has quite the same ideas about the sanctity of human life. How could one?

JAMES: You'll find that juries have kept pretty much the same ideas, I fancy.

PHILIP: Yes, but revolvers often go off accidently. You said so yourself. This is going to be the purest accident. Can't you see it in the papers? "The deceased's nephew, who was obviously upset—"

JAMES: I suppose you think it's brave to come back from the front and threaten a defenceless

man with a revolver ? Is that the sort of fair play they teach you in the Army ?

PHILIP : Good heavens ! of course it is. You don't think that you wait until the other side has got just as many guns as you before you attack ? You're really rather lucky Strictly speaking, I ought to have thrown half a dozen bombs at you first. (*Taking one out of his pocket*) As it happens, I've only got one.

JAMES (*thoroughly alarmed*) : Put that back at once.

PHILIP (*putting down the revolver and taking it in his hands*) : You hold it in the right hand—so—taking care to keep the lever down. Then you take the pin in the finger—so, and—but perhaps this doesn't interest you ?

JAMES (*edging his chair away*) : Put it down at once, sir. Good heavens ! anything might happen.

PHILIP (*putting it down and taking up the revolver again*) : Does it ever occur to you, Uncle James, that there are about three million people in England who know all about bombs, and how to throw them, and——

JAMES : It certainly does not occur to me. I should never dream of letting these things occur to me.

PHILIP (*looking at the bomb regretfully*) : It's rather against my principles as a soldier; but just to make things a bit more fair—(*generously*) you shall have it.

[*He holds it out to him suddenly.*]

JAMES (*shrinking back again*) : Certainly not, sir. It might go off at any moment.

PHILIP (*putting it back in his pocket*): Oh no; it's quite useless; there's no detonator...(*Sternly*) Now then, let's talk business.

JAMES: What do you want me to do?

PHILIP: Strictly speaking, you should be holding your hands over your head and saying "Kamerad!" However, I'll let you off that. All I ask from you is that you should be reasonable.

JAMES: And if I refuse, you'll shoot me?

PHILIP: Well, I do not quite know, Uncle James. I expect we should go through this little scene again to-morrow. You haven't enjoyed it, have you? Well, there's lots more of it to come. We'll rehearse it every day. One day, if you go on being unreasonable, the thing will go off. Of course, you think I shouldn't have the pluck to fire. But you can't be quite certain. It's a hundred to one that I shan't—only I might. Fear—It's a horrible thing. Elderly men die of it sometimes.

JAMES: Pooh! I'm not to be bluffed like that.

PHILIP (*suddenly*): You're quite right: you're not that sort. I made a mistake. (*Aiming carefully*). I shall have to do it straight off, after all. One—two——

JAMES (*on his knees, with uplifted hands, in an agony of terror*): Philip! Mercy! What are your terms?

PHILIP (*picking him up by the scruff, and helping him into the chair*): Good man, that's the way to talk. I'll get them for you. Make yourself com-

fortable in front of the fire till I come back. Here's the paper.

[*He gives his uncle the paper, and goes out into the hall.*]

* * *

[JAMES *opens his eyes with a start and looks round him in a bewildered way. He rubs his head, takes out his watch and looks at it, and then stares round the room again. The door from the dining room opens, and* PHILIP *comes in with a piece of toast in his hand.*]

PHILIP (*his mouth full*): You wanted to see me, Uncle James?

JAMES (*still bewildered*): That's all right, my boy that's all right. What have you been doing?

PHILIP (*surprised*): Breakfast. (*Putting the last piece in his mouth*) Rather late, I'm afraid.

JAMES: That's all right.

[*He laughs awkwardly.*]

PHILIP: Anything the matter? You don't look your usual bright self.

JAMES: I—er—seem to have dropped asleep in front of the fire. Most unusual thing for me to have done. Most unusual.

PHILIP: Let that be a lesson to you not to get up so early. Of course, if you're in the Army you can't help yourself. Thank heaven I'm out of it, and my own master again.

JAMES: Ah, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. Sit down, Philip.

[*He indicates the chair by the fire.*]

PHILIP (*taking a chair by the table*): You have that, uncle; I shall be all right here.

JAMES (*hastily*): No, no; you come here. (*He gives* PHILIP *the armchair and sits by the table himself.*) I should be dropping off again.

[*He laughs awkwardly.*]

PHILIP: Righto.

[*He puts his hand to his pocket.* UNCLE JAMES *shivers and looks at him in horror.* PHILIP *brings out his pipe, and a sickly grin of relief comes into* JAMES'S *face.*]

JAMES: I suppose you smoked a lot in France?

PHILIP: Rather! Nothing else to do. It's allowed in here.

JAMES (*hastily*): Yes, yes, of course. (PHILIP *lights his pipe.*) Well, now, Philip, what are you going to do, now you've left the Army?

PHILIP (*promptly*): Burn my uniform and sell my revolver.

JAMES (*starting at the word "revolver"*): Sell your revolver, eh?

PHILIP (*surprised*): Well, I don't want it now, do I?

JAMES: No...Oh, no...Oh, most certainly not, I should say. Oh, I can't see why you should want it at all. (*With an uneasy laugh*) You're in England now. No need for revolvers here—eh?

PHILIP (*staring at him*): Well, no, I hope not.

JAMES (*hastily*): Quite so. Well now, Philip, what next? We must find a profession for you.

PHILIP (*yawning*): I suppose so. I haven't really thought about it much.

JAMES: You never wanted to be an architect?

PHILIP (*surprised*): Architect?

[JAMES *rubs his head and wonders what made him think of architect.*]

JAMES: Or anything like that.

PHILIP: It's a bit late, isn't it?

JAMES: Well, if you're four years behind, so is everybody else.

[*He feels vaguely that he has heard this argument before.*]

PHILIP (*smiling*): To tell the truth, I don't feel I mind much anyway. Anything you like—except a commissionaire. I absolutely refuse to wear uniform again.

JAMES: How would you like to come into the business?

PHILIP: The jam business? Well, I don't know. You wouldn't want me to salute you in the mornings?

JAMES: My dear boy, no!

PHILIP: All right, I'll try it if you like. I don't know if I shall be any good—what do you do?

JAMES: It's your experience in managing and—er—handling men which I hope will be of value.

PHILIP: Oh, I can do that all right. (*Stretching himself luxuriously*) Uncle James, do you realise that I'm never going to salute again, or wear a uniform, or get wet—really wet, I mean—or examine men's feet, or stand to attention when

I'm spoken to, or—oh, lots more things? And best of all, I'm never going to be frightened again. Have you ever known what it is to be afraid—really afraid?

JAMES (*embarrassed*): I—er—well——

[*He coughs.*]

PHILIP: No, you couldn't—not really afraid of death, I mean. Well, that's over now. Good lord! I could spend the rest of my life in the British Museum and be happy...

JAMES (*getting up*): All right, we'll try you in the office. I expect you want a holiday first, though.

PHILIP (*getting up*): My dear uncle, this is holiday. Being in London is holiday. Buying an evening paper—wearing a waistcoat again—running after a bus—anything—it's all holiday.

JAMES: All right, then, come along with me now, and I'll introduce you to Mr. Bamford.

PHILIP: Right. Who's he?

JAMES: Our manager. A little stiff, but a very good fellow. He'll be delighted to hear that you are coming into the firm.

PHILIP (*smiling*): Perhaps I'd better bring my revolver, in case he isn't.

JAMES (*laughing with forced heartiness as they go together to the door*): Ha, ha! A good joke! Ha, ha, ha! A good joke—but only a joke, of course. Ha, ha! He, he, he!

[PHILIP *goes out.* JAMES, *following him turns at the door, and looks round the room in a bewildered way. Was it a dream, or wasn't it? He will never be quite certain.*]

CURTAIN

Nargis Parveen *
B. A. (1st) Lahore College,
Lahore.

EDMOND SEE

AN OLD FRIEND

CHARACTERS

Le Blumel

Dautier—his Secretary

Lambruche—his Old Friend

Pierre—his Butler

Madame—his Wife

AN OLD FRIEND

Le Blumel's study. He is a ministerial Under-Secretary. We are in his private apartment. Luxuriously furnished. Beautiful old tapestries. A bookcase. Massive desk table in the centre of the room. At left, on an easel, a large portrait of Mme Le Blumel. *When the curtain goes up,* Le Blumel *is working, sitting at his table. A knock on the door.*

Le Blumel : Come in. (Dautier *enters.*) That you, Dautier ?

Dautier : Good morning, sir.

Le Blumel : Good morning. Been to the Ministry ?

Dautier : Yes, sir.

Le Blumel : Did you see the head of my department ?

Dautier : Yes, sir. I spoke to Monsieur Rosenthal ?

Le Blumel : You told him ?

Dautier : Quite so, sir. That last Friday evening you had a violent attack of gout, that you were unable to go to the Ministry on Saturday, nor were you able to go to the Senate. That yesterday, Monday, you hoped to be able to go out, but the doctor had absolutely forbidden it. Also that it

was possible you might not be able to stir the end of the week and that, consequently, Monsieur Rosenthal was to attend to all current affairs and to receive people on your behalf.

LE BLUMEL : Good. What did he say ?

DAUTIER : He requested me to express his best wishes to you for your prompt recovery.

LE BLUMEL : Kind of him !

DAUTIER : I am delighted to see that you are better to-day.

LE BLUMEL : Yes. I am much better. It's only my left foot...Ouch !...But I hope that one or two aspirins will...Did you see anybody else ?

DAUTIER : No one, sir.

LE BLUMEL : Monsieur le Ministre ?

DAUTIER : He had not arrived yet

LE BLUMEL : That doesn't surprise us, does it ?

DAUTIER (*smiling*) : No, sir.

LE BLUMEL : What time was it ?

DAUTIER : Eleven o'clock.

LE BLUMEL : Eleven o'clock ! All I can say is that it's a good job we Under-Secretaries are here, loyal and devoted to our work ! They can run us down as much as they like and call us useless relics whenever they...(*He interrupts himself.*) Did you bring my letters ?

DAUTIER : Here they are, sir.

LE BLUMEL (*looking at the addresses on the envelopes*) : Let's see. (*He reads.*) "Monsieur the Under-Secretary, Ministry of..." (*He takes another one.*) 'Monsieur the Under-Secretary, Ministry

of..." (*He takes another one.*) This one is not for me. (Dautier *looks astonished.*) "Monsieur le Ministre..." (*He holds the letter out to him.*) Look at it.

DAUTIER: I beg pardon, sir. (*He looks at the envelope.*) "Monsieur le Ministre le Blumel." (*He hands it back to him.*)

LE BLUMEL (*reading*): "Monsieur le Ministre le Blumel". Yes, it's my name. It's just a mistake. Some ignorant person who didn't know.

DAUTIER: Or who foretells!

LE BLUMEL (*with a shade of satisfaction*): Dautier, you're a flatterer! Open them, will you? (*He points to the last letter.*) That one first.

DAUTIER (*reading*): "Monsieur le Ministre—Dear Sir. At the last interview you were kind enough to grant me, you allowed me to hope that you would consent to intervene on my behalf regarding the lease of the tobacco shop in question..." (*He interrupts his reading.*) Oh, yes, it's that crazy old lady, mother of a policeman. They say he died for his country on the field of glory, but he really died of congestion of the brain while drunk, eighty-kilometers from the front. You told me to file the affair, sir.

LE BLUMEL: Did I?

DAUTIER: Yes, sir. It was not worthy of your interest.

LE BLUMEL: The policeman wasn't perhaps, but that has nothing to do with his dear old mother... Give me the letter. (*He reads.*) "Will you

allow me, dear Monsieur le Ministre, to appeal to your well-known kindness of heart and..." (*He continues to read to himself*) Poor dear old lady! She expresses herself very well. It is extremely touching. Leave her letter with me. I will look into the affair myself...I will answer it personally or better still I will approach the real Monsieur le Ministre...approach him is a figure of speach ..how can I approach a man who is never there to be approached ?

DAUTIER (*laughing*) : Very good that, sir !

LE BLUMEL : It's a play on words, isn't it ?

DAUTIER : An excellent one, sir.

LE BLUMEL : You're right. It's an excellent one. Even an Under-Secretary can remember that he has been a man of letters. (*The word reminds him of his correspondence.*) Let us have a look at the others. (*He takes the letters.*) "Monsieur the Under-Secretary...Dear Sir, I have the honour of recalling to your kind attention..." (*A violent noise is heard in the next room.*) What's that noise ?

DAUTIER (*listening*) : It sounds like...

LE BLUMEL : Precisely ! It sounds like my son's voice ! And my wife's ! That boy is at it again ! I won't stand it ! It is beyond endurance ! (*He rings.*)

[PIERRE *enters.*]

LE BLUMEL : What's that noise ?

PIERRE : I don't know, sir.

LE BLUMEL : Then find out ! Ask Madame to tell that child to be quiet. No, don't. Ask Madame

to be kind enough to come to my study.

PIERRE: Very good, sir. *(Exit.)*

[A short silence. The noise off is louder than ever.]

LE BLUMEL: Listen! There they go! How could anybody work under such disturbing conditions?

DAUTIER: Boys will be boys, sir.

LE BLUMEL: Rot! My son is spoilt. That's what he is. I spoil him as much as anybody. He takes advantage of it and so does his mother!

DAUTIER: He is still young.

LE BLUMEL: That's what she tells me every day of the week. "He is still very young." For her, he'll be "still very young" all his life. The boy is nearly seven. Idleness is the worst thing in the world for him. Now for the past fortnight, his governess has been ill and he has taken entire control of the situation. My life has been made unbearable. The time has come when we must take that boy out of the hands of women, if we want him ever to become a man As soon as we receive the reply we are expecting...I am astonished we haven't had it yet. When did you take that letter?

DAUTIER: What letter, sir?

LE BLUMEL: The letter I asked you to take by hand to the Alembert school?

DAUTIER: Oh, the letter for Monsieur Lambruche?

LE BLUMEL: Yes, for my old friend Lambruche. He is the very man we need for that child. He'll make an ideal tutor for him. If only I had thought

of it sooner! What surprises me is we've not heard from Lambruche yet.

DAUTIER: It is not a bit surprising sir. It was only last Friday that I went to the school where you said that Monsieur Lambruche was a class master You remember what they told me, that Monsieur Lambruche had left eight years ago and that they didn't know his present address.

LE BLUMEL: But you found the address?

DAUTIER: It took one or two days.

LE BLUMEL: Well?

DAUTIER: Monsieur Lambruche may have been away.

LE BLUMEL: Yes, perhaps. In any case we shall hear from him soon. He will rush round here the minute he receives my letter Dear old Lambruche! It will be a happy surprise for him.

DAUTIER: Undoubtedly, sir.

LE BLUMEL: It will be so unexpected.

DAUTIER: Is it a long time since you saw him sir?

LE BLUMEL: I've not really seen him since we were both students. He was preparing for his D.L. I was studying law. Every evening, after lectures, we had dinner together, in a little cafe rue Soufflot. I can see it now. It was a modest little cafe. In those days we weren't rolling in gold! That didn't matter. We were alive. We were gay and young and carefree. We enjoyed ourselves. And we worked, not only because we had exams to pass, no, we worked for the joy of working. We wrote,

we composed verse. I did too. I actually had a book of verse published! Didn't you know that? "The Sonorous Waves" it was called. What a title! You have to be young to think of a title like that! If my friends in the Senate or on the Press knew about it, what wouldn't they do to me? Lambruche and I were like brothers, until the day when fate separated our paths. Once I had passed my exams, I went home to Haute Garonne, to live with my father because I was to take on his legal practice. I married. Marriage provided me with the means of going into politics. Lambruche went his own way. He had to give up writing too and devote himself entirly to teaching. I've met him only once since the old days, about eight years ago...he was coming out of the Alembert school. His pupils were with him, so he couldn't stop for me than a moment. I promised to write to him and to arrange a meeting...Then...I...

DAUTIER: Of course not, sir. I hope you won't find your friend very changed. Eight years is a long time.

LE BLUMEL: That doesn't worry me. I'd not be surprised to find that he'd got on very well. Intelligence and hard work never fail. I don't mean that everyday can make as much of themselves as I have done. That's another matter. I remember Lambruche had a sweet old mother who used to send him money...(*A pause.*) You're right though...it has been a long time...If he were in any financial difficulty at the moment...all the more

reason to hold out a helping hand...He's an old friend, Dautier...a friend of my youth...Think how happy he'll be here with his pal who has become "Monsieur le Ministre"! Well...in a manner of speaking...you know what I mean...

DAUTIER: Quite, sir.

LE BLUMEL: Good old Lambruche! I can't wait to see him! He'll be so proud of me! You understand, don't you?

DAUTIER: I do indeed sir.

LE BLUMEL: I am sure you do. But my wife may not understand quite so well.

DAUTIER: Madame le Blumel doesn't know?

LE BLUMEL: No, not yet. You see, wherever the child is concerned, she is very weak-minded. He was fond of his governess. (MME LE BLUMEL *enters.*) There you are, at last!

MME LE BLUMEL: Did you send for me, dear? (Dautier *bows when he sees her.*) Good morning, Monsieur Dautier.

DAUTIER: Madame.

MME LE BLUMEL: I was frightened of disturbing you, dear.

LE BLUMEL: You're not disturbing me, but your son is.

MME LE BLUMEL: Can you hear him in here?

LE BLUMEL: Can I hear him? Dautier, she wants to know if we can hear him!

DAUTIER (*trying to get away this*): Shall I get on with my work, sir?

LE BLUMEL : Yes, go along, my boy. Here, you might attend to that and that...(*He hands him some papers.*) And please look up the data for my speech. Don't be long. We have some work to do together.

DAUTIER : Very good, sir...Madame...(*He bows, exit.*)

LE BLUMEL (*to his wife*) : Yes, I can hear your son. He makes such a row I can't hear anything else.

MME LE BLUMEL : I am so sorry. I tried to keep him quiet. But you can't stop the poor little fellow from getting a trifle out of hand while his governess is ill ! It'll only be a few more days. Mademoiselle de Quinsonnas will be back at the end of the week.

LE BLUMEL : The end of the week ?

MME LE BLUMEL : Yes. (*Gesture of annoyance from* Le Blumel.) What's the matter ?

LE BLUMEL : Just this ...You may let the charming Mademoiselle de Quinsonnas know that she can stay away for good.

MME LE BLUMEL : Why ?

LE BLUMEL : Because I do not intend to take her back again. We are going to dispense with her services in the future.

MME LE BLUMEL : For what reason ?

LE BLUMEL : Because the boy has arrived at an age when we must take the education a little more seriously.

MME LE BLUMEL : He is still very young.

LE BLUMEL : There you are again! No, he is not "still very young." At seven years of age, child ought to begin to really study. If we want to make a man of him, he must be taught by a man.

MME LE BLUMEL : A man?

LE BLUMEL : Exactly. A tutor...who will instruct him properly. When you meet the one whom I have engaged...

MME LE BLUMEL : You have already engaged some-one?

LE BLUMEL : Well, not exactly...But I've found the very man and I've offered the position to him.

MME LE BLUMEL : Why haven't you mentioned it to me before?

LE BLUMEL : I saw no necessity of speaking to you about it until now.

MME LE BLUMEL : Who is he?

LE BLUMEL (*quickly*) : An old friend of mine, a friend of my youth with whom I studied in the Latin Quarter. He was preparing for his D.L. and to-day he is a University Professor...

MME LE BLUMEL : What is his name?

LE BLUMEL : Lambruche.

MME LE BLUMEL Lambruche.

LE BLUMEL : Yes, Lambruche! (*She laughs.*) What are you laughing at?

MME LE BLUMEL : It can't be Lambruche!

LE BLUMEL : Why not? You've never met him!

MME LE BLUMEL : I mean his name...It's so ridi-culous!

LE BLUMEL : We don't choose our own names... The important thing is that Lambruche is exactly the person we want at the moment.

MME LE BLUMEL : He may not accept.

LE BLUMEL : Oh, yes he will. I've given the matter a great deal of thought.

MME LE BLUMEL : Have you talked to Monsieur Lambruche ?

LE BLUMEL : Of course.

MME LE BLUMEL : Where did you see him ?

LE BLUMEL (*embarrassed*) : Oh well......Various places...he came to the Ministry. We met...let me see...not quite a year ago, in front of the...er... University...er...school...where he is a professor. He was coming out. He had just held his lecture. We enjoyed a good long hour together, talking over old times. He told me all about his life, his work. He has done remarkably well. He's somebody, you know. Yet he's kind and gentle with children. A delightful fellow.

MME LE BLUMEL : Have you come to an arrangement with him ?

LE BLUMEL : On principle, yes...

MME LE BLUMEL : Only on principle ?

LE BLUMEL : Well, he's going to give me his definite answer soon. I'm expecting him here at any moment. That's why I wanted to let you know about it so that you could tell the child yourself.

MME LE BLUMEL : Poor little boy.

LE BLUMEL : "Poor little boy." What do you

mean "Poor little boy"? I don't see why you need be sorry for him.

MME LE BLUMEL: He is so sensitive and he was so fond of Mademoiselle de Quinsonnas.

LE BLUMEL: In a week's time he will be every bit as fond of his tutor.

MME LE BLUMEL: How little you know your son! I will try to soften the blow, to prepare him...

LE BLUMEL: That's right.. (PIERRE *enters.*) What do you want now?

PIERRE: I beg pardon, sir. There is a person here who insists on being received.

LE BLUMEL: A person?

PIERRE: Well, sir..er...a strange kind of man with a (squash) hat...and muffler, sir...He looks queer, sir.

LE BLUMEL: What does he want?

PIERRE: He says he has an appointment with you, sir.

LE BLUMEL: An appointment with me? I have not made any appointments. Perhaps he is one of my voters.

PIERRE: I don't think so, sir.

MME LE BLUMEL: Do be careful, dear. It might be some criminal! That's the worst of being in the public eye...such queer people call on you! It's frightening!

LE BLUMEL (*quieting her*): Now! Now! (*To* PIERRE.) Why didn't you ask him for his card?

PIERRE: I did, sir. He didn't have one. He wrote his name on a piece of paper.

LE BLUMEL : Let me see it. (*He reads*). Oh! Good! Show him in at once.

PIERRE : Yes, sir. (*Exit* PIERRE.)

MME LE BLUMEL : Who is it ?

LE BLUMEL : It's...(*stopping*) nobody you know. Run along to the boy.

MME LE BLUMEL : About this tutor...You have not settled definitely with him yet. If you don't come to terms with him I want you to promise one thing...(*She hesitates.*)

LE BLUMEL : What is it ? What is it ? Hurry up !

MME LE BLUMEL : Promise me that we'll take Mademoiselle de Quinsonnas back again.

LE BLUMEL : All right, I promise. Run along now.

MME LE BLUMEL : That's sweet of you...and I won't let him make so much noise again !

LE BLUMEL : Run along ! (*Exit* MME LE BLUMEL. *Almost as she goes off,* PIERRE *shows in* LAMBRUCHE.) So there you are ! Come in, old man, come in.

[*Exit* PIERRE *and* LAMBRUCHE *comes into the room. He is a miserable, poor, timid looking creature. He is holding an old hat in his hands, which is of an indefinable colour. The collar of his coat is pitiable. There are two or three buttons lacking on the overcoat and he keeps the collar turned well up in order to hide his linen.*]

LE BLUMEL (*controlling a start of disagreeable surprise*) : Good old Lambruche ! It's really I !

Your old friend! I'm glad you've come! Wr've not seen each other for a long time, have we?

LAMBRUCHE: No, it's some years.

LE BLUMEL: Seven or eight.

LAMBRUCHE: At least.

LE BLUMEL: The last time was in front of your school, do you remember? We were going to arrange to meet...but...

LAMBRUCHE: But we didn't arrange to meet.

LE BLUMEL: Two such busy men as we are! What can you expect? We lose sight of our old friends. Fortunately, we don't forget them! When the opportunity offers, we always remember...Good old Lambruche! Come and sit down! I can't tell you how really delighted I am to see you again! How are you? You have not changed a bit!

LAMBRUCHE (*with melancholy*): No?

LE BLUMEL: No, not much, really you haven't. You're slightly thinner, perhaps...

LAMBRUCHE: I should think I am and my hair has turned white too.

LE BLUMEL: Hardly that. Well, we're not as young as we used to be. Age, you know.

LAMBRUCHE (*profoundly*): Yes, age and other things.

LE BLUMEL: Quite so...quite so...(*A slight pause.*) How do you think I look? I've not changed much, have I?

LAMBRUCHE: Yes.

LE BLUMEL: What?

LAMBRUCHE: I daresay I would have recognized you...but it's your hair, you know.

LE BLUMEL: Not so thick, eh?

LAMBRUCHE: And your body, too...your stomach... You always had a tendency to fat, but...er...You stood up straighter when you were young.

LE BLUMEL: You think I am heavier, do you?

LAMBRUCHE: A little. It's quite natural.

LE BLÛMEL: Ah, yes.

LAMBRUCHE: As you say, age.

LE BLUMEL: Quite so.

LAMBRUCHE: One cannot have lived one's youth and kept it.

[*A slight pause.*]

LE BLUMEL: Good old Lambruche! I feel young and gay enough anyway and I am never ill. A twinge of gout now and then. I'm having an attack at the moment. That's why I asked you to come here instead of to the Ministry. The doctor has forbidden me to go out for a day or two. This is my study. Where I work...Comfortable, isn't it?

LAMBRUCHE (*placing his hand at back of his ear in the manner habitual to a deaf person*): What did you say?

LE BLUMEL (*louder*): I said: It's comfortable here, isn't it?

LAMBRUCHE: I am a little hard of hearing, you must excuse me. Especially on the right side... When the weather is as cold as it is to-day, I'm very susceptible...and it's none too warm in here. (*He shivers.*)

LE BLUMEL : It can't be cold in here..the heat's on.

LAMBRUCHE : These large rooms are always cold. I've become very shivery. I need small cosy rooms, flooded with sun. Like that little place you used to have up under the roof in the rue Serpente. Do you remember ? That was a really nice room.

LE BLUMEL (*rather nervously*) : But it's nicer here, don't you think ? We didn't have many comforts there.

LAMBRUCHE : Yes, but it was nice just the same. There was that big window facing south and the light came in...

LE BLUMEL : Light and cold !

LAMBRUCHE (*continuing his thought*) : ...and in the middle of the room was the big stove with the kettle on it, singing away...It gave out a sort of gentle warmth...and you could regulate the temperature of the room to suit yourself....In these modern apartments you're either too hot or freezing...(*He coughs.*) Then all this furniture and these hangings..you're bound to breathe in a lot of dust and microbes. If you've a...(*He has an attack of coughing.*)

LE BLUMEL (*affectionately*) : Poor old chap !

LAMBRUCHE (*trying in vain to get his breath*) : It's all right. It...will...pass...It's my damn bronchial tubes..been worrying me for years...as soon as winter sets in...(*He coughs.*) It's a nuisance !

LE BLUMEL : Will you have something to drink ? A cup of tea, to warm you ?..I'll have one with you.

LAMBRUCHE : Tea ?

LE BLUMEL : Or something else ?

LAMBRUCHE : I would prefer something.. ...else...I don't like tea...something a trifle stronger.

LE BLUMEL : What would you like ?

LAMBRUCHE : I don't know...Anything you have... (*He sees a tray with liqueurs on it.*) That will do.

LE BLUMEL (*rather surprised*) : Those are liqueurs. After lunch, we generally have coffee in here. A drop of brandy ?

LAMBRUCHE : Thank you.

LE BLUMEL : Here you are. (*He brings the tray and puts it down within reach of* LAMBRUCHE.) Serve yourself. (LAMBRUCHE *pours himself out a glass and is about to pour out another.* LE BLUMEL *stops him saying.*) Not for me. This gout, you know, and then never before lunch.

LAMBRUCHE (*drinks*) : Excellent ! May I ? (*He pours out a second glass which he swallows.*) I feel better now. (*A pause.*)

LE BLUMEL : I hope you've not lost your good habits ! You used to refuse to touch alcohol... remember ? We used to rag you about it.

LAMBRUCHE : I was strong and well in those days. I didn't have to put oil into the lamp.

LE BLUMEL : Aren't you well, now ?

LAMBRUCHE : Oh, I'm well enough, if I am careful...

LE BLUMEL : You must look after yourself then.

LAMBRUCHE : That's easy to say ! Doctors and medicines are expensive...

LE BLUMEL : Yes, of course, but...in your position...

LAMBRUCHE : My position !

LE BLUMEL : A man who belongs to the "Alma Mater"...the University...

LAMBRUCHE : The University and I parted company a long time ago....

LE BLUMEL (*surprised*) : I didn't know. The last time we met, your were coming out...

LAMBRUCHE (*bitterly*) : Yes, I was coming out ! In the hope that I might never go in again ! When you met me, I was serving my last month of prison.

LE BLUMEL : Didn't you like it ?

LAMBRUCHE (*ironically*) : Like it !...Like spending my days and nights attempting to control a lot of miserable brats who didn't know what kind of torture to invent next ? It was like going through martyrdom. Their greatest delight was my infirmity.

LE BLUMEL: Your infirmity ?

LAMBRUCHE : Yes, my ears...Just about that time I began to go deaf. I had felt it coming on and then it got worse and worse. Oh, I'm better now, I have had treatment. I can hear you quite well...I'm all right if I sit near to the person who's speaking. But I went through an awful time with those little beasts ! A deaf class master was pie for them ! I tried to react. I attempted to dominate, but they always got the better of me. They invented a thousand tricks to madden me. One day, a particularly nasty little pest went too far, I lost my temper and flew at him. He'll never forget the

hiding I gave him! Unfortunately, he happened to be an ambassador's son...The affair assumed enormous proportions. They wanted me to apologize. I refused, so they gave me the sack and I found myself turned out on to the street without a penny in my pockets!

[*A pause*]

LE BLUMEL: I thought your mother...

LAMBRUCHE: I've not seen my mother for a long time...We quarrelled...When I got married she...

LE BLUMEL: I didn't know that you were...congratulations.

LAMBRUCHE: Thanks.

LE BLUMEL: Didn't your mother get on with your wife?

LAMBRUCHE: She didn't even try to get on with her. My mother refused to see her.

LE BLUMEL: Why?

LAMBRUCHE: My mother had her principles and the lady I chose for my wife was not of our class.

LE BLUMEL: I am sure that the one you chose to bear your name was worthy...

LAMBRUCHE (*violently*): Worthy? I should think she was worthy, more than anyone else in the world! You know that as well as I do!

LE BLUMEL (*surprised*): I?

LAMBRUCHE: You know my wife! We used to be pals, all four of us. Your Georgette and you and my Lucienne and I...

LE BLUMEL: What?

LAMBRUCHE: Yes, Lulu! I married her.

LE BLUMEL : You amaze me !

LAMBRUCHE (*ironically and superior*) : Possibly I do ! You wouldn't have married Georgette. No ! You were too ambitious. You took all the best she had to give, her beauty...her youth ..and then good-bye ! "Good luck to you ! Get out of my way !" Well, I acted differently to Lulu...

LE BLUMEL : The important thing is that she has made you happy.

LAMBRUCHE : Good Lord ! The poor little thing ! She's done the best she could. Life got hold of us both and crushed us.

LE BLUMEL : Things haven't been easy ?

LAMBRUCHE (*sombrely*) : No, not very easy ! At first, it was all right. I had no reason to complain. With the little money I dragged out of my mother from my inheritance, we got married and we furnished a small home. My girl and I were happy.. and then a child came, a little boy. He was so beautiful. After that there were three of us and I had to work hard. Thanks to my diplomas, I found a place as coach and I gave private lessons too. I was all right and it lasted for five or six years. Then, suddenly, bad luck began to come. Things changed, sorrow, misfortune, our little son died after ten days of suffering, a frightful illness ...in his head...meningitis.

LE BLUMEL : Poor old fellow !

LAMBRUCHE : I'd rather not talk about it. But it was terrible. My wife never got over it. She adored him. Then little by little, she changed. She

disliked staying at home. She hated being alone with me. She went out for hours and hours. I don't know where she went and when she came home in the evening...(*Quickly.*) Don't think that I blame her. She wanted to forget. Only she wasn't very strong. She fell ill. Her cough was bad and she grew very thin. The doctor ordered her to go south. I couldn't let her go alone, so I gave up my position and my lessons and I hoped. well... that I would get some employment in the south... then...(*A silence*)

LE BLUMEL: You had bad luck.

LAMBRUCHE: All that was nothing. ...If I were to tell you about my life during these past eight years! I have been a jack of all trades! At one time I was a delivery boy. Yes, old man, for a tailor in the Boulevard Poissonniere! I ran about from morning to evening carrying bundles. Yes, I with all my diplomas! Then I sang songs in a cabaret at Montmarte, songs that I composed myself, accompanying them on the piano...That was the worst part of it. ...But they paid me rather well and I could have as much to drink as I liked. They gave me five or six cherry brandies during each performance. It took the place of a meal because alcohol is nourishing and it warms you. May I? (*He pours himself out a glass of brandy and drinks it off at one gulp.*) It does warm you! Makes you ready for your work. At night, when I got home. instead of going to bed, I would sit at my

little table and write until dawn. It was then I composed my best poem : "The deliverance of the Soul."

Le Blumel : You've continued to write poetry ?

Lambruche (*exaltedly*) : Always ! I have remained faithful to my ideals in spite of the difficulties of life. A poet I was born and a poet I will die ! I've written volumes and volumes of poetry. But none so good as the poem I've just mentioned. That is better than anything that has ever been done by anybody. It has the vibrant subtlety of Verlaine, the heartsick bitterness of Baudelaire...and something more I don't flatter myself ! I see my work clearly, pitilessly. I can say something to you that I couldn't to anyone else. Now I can die, my name will live ! I'll read you some passages...those we have published in our review.

Le Blumel : Your...

Lambruche : Yes, "The New Truth" ! I am one of the editors ! Of course it's an honorary position. "The New Truth" doesn't pay. I go there in the evening...when I've finished my copying...that is what I am reduced to. I make copies at so much the page for ten hours a day. Now let's talk about you. How are you, poor old man ?

Le Blumel (*stupefied*) : Poor old...me ?

Lambruche : I daresay you've had troubles too. How are things with you now ?

Le Blumel : Things have gone well with me all along.

Lambruche (*staining his ear*) : What did you say ?

LE BLUMEL (*louder*) : I said things have gone well with me all along

LAMBRUCHE : You're quite right. It is easier to live alone.

LE BLUMEL (*protesting*) : I am not alone. I am married too.

LAMBRUCHE : Poor old man!

LE BLUMEL (*animatedly*) : I married a charming and beautiful woman, Marescot's daughter.

LAMBRUCHE : Who ?

LE BLUMEL : Marescot, the famous painter.

LAMBRUCHE : Never heard of him !

LE BLUMEL : You must have done...he is a member of the Institute.

LAMBRUCHE (*ironically*) : I know the type...long dull whiskers ! In the old days we used to make fun of them, didn't we ? Figure heads...Bluffs !

LE BLUMEL : You're mistaken about my father-in-law. ...This is one of his paintings, my wife's portrait....

LAMBRUCHE (*looks at it*) : Is that your wife ? (*A pause.*) Is she beautiful ?

LE BLUMEL : Don't you think so ?

LAMBRUCHE : It's very difficult to tell from a painting like that, all slicked up and arranged...(*A pause, then lightly.*) Anyway, she doesn't look like Georgette ! Now, she *was* a beauty !

LE BLUMEL : My wife is...

LAMBRUCHE (*interrupting him*) : Have you any children ?

LE BLUMEL: One child, a fine little boy. By the way, it was... (*He stops.*)

LAMBRUCHE: It was?

LE BLUMEL: When I asked you to come and see me, I wanted to suggest to you...(*He stops again.*) I'll tell you about that at some other time...yes, I have a son.

LAMBRUCHE: Is he at all like you?

LE BLUMEL (*startled*). Well, yes.. they say that he is...very. (*He loooks mechanically at a photograph.*)

LAMBRUCHE: Is that his photogragh?

LE BLUMEL: It's not a very good one.

LAMBRUCHE: May I see it? (*He takes the photograph and examines it while* LE BLUMEL *watches him anxiously.*) Yes, he is quite good looking.

LE BLUMEL (*gratified*): Isn't he?

LAMBRUCHE: Are you satisfied with him?

LE BLUMEL: Very. Of course, he is a bit noisy. He has reached the age when he needs direction... Someone to look after him.

LAMBRUCHE: Of course.

LE BLUMEL: I've no fault to find with the child He enjoys himself and that's proof that he is in good health.

LAMBRUCHE: Is he well?

LE BLUMEL (*surprised*): Of course!

LAMBRUCHE: Keep him well.

LE BLUMEL: I should hope so!

LAMBRUCHE: You never know with children...Mine was lively too...then...all at once...Look after your boy.. Take care of him...

LE BLUMEL : We do.

LAMBRUCHE : He doesn't look very strong.

LE BLUMEL *(quickly)* : He is though.

LAMBRUCHE : I hope so. It is so sad to have a child suddenly taken ill.... Watch him. That's my advice to you...for your own sake and his too, poor little fellow.

LE BLUMEL *(nervously)* : No need to worry about him. He lives at home with us. His mother spoils him, so do I and so does everybody else. When a child is the son of a man in the public eye, a man in power...

LAMBRUCHE *(with his hand to his ear)* : What did you say ?

LE BLUMEL : I say a man in power....

LAMBRUCHE : Have you any power ?

LE BLUMEL *(nervously)* : Of course, I'm only an Under-Secretary at present but...

LAMBRUCHE : The government changes so often...I suppose it keeps you rather busy.

LE BLUMEL : Yes, it does.

LAMBRUCHE : Poor old fellow ! I pity you. What a lot of papers you must have to wade through ! And the speeches ! And the masses of people who flatter you until they have got what they want out of you ! It's a bad exchange for our lovely old time, isn't it ? Then we used to spend our evenings reading what we had written during the day. We intended to be great men, poets of the future, torch bearers for our generation. You were the most gifted of us all. You were the only one who

had a book published. Your poems "The Sonorous Waves" were very fine!

LE BLUMEL: I'd rather not talk about that book.

LAMBRUCHE: Why?

LE BLUMEL: It was nonsense!

LAMBRUCHE (*indignant*): Nonsense? To imbeciles perhaps. Not to us. We admired you and we hoped for such great things from you. Last week, when I received your letter, I showed it to my wife and we began talking about those old times. We got out your book...with the dedication you wrote in it: "To Lambruche, a great poet, first poems from one who aspires to greatness." My little woman and I often reread them. I know some lines by heart. The other evening we went over and over them until two o'clock in the morning. They made us both cry! Then after we'd gone to bed, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't stop thinking, so I woke my wife and we talked about you. How gifted you used to be...how well you might have done...how sad it is that you have failed. My little woman said it wasn't your fault, it is just the filthy heartlessness of life's necessities which have obliged you to give in. Life got the better of you. It crushes us all.......My poor old fellow! (*He pours out another glass of brandy and swallows it.*) But we mustn't dwell on the sadness of it all...We must look ahead, courageously! We're both here! Perhaps we can help each other! As far as I am concerned, you can

count on me, absolutely! Let me see ..You wrote to me that you wanted to ask something of me....

LE BLUMEL (*protesting*): Not exactly....

LAMBRUCHE: What the devil did I do with your letter? I thought that I...(*He searches in his pockets finds it and reads*). Here we are...(*Reading*) "My dear Lambruche, when you receive this note, come to my home to see me at once because I can't go to my Ministry.' Your...Yes, that's true it is your Ministry, isn't it?

LE BLUMEL (*ironically*): Yes.

LAMBRUCHE (*continuing*): "......to my Ministry, I want to ask you to undertake something which I hope will please you, should you accept, and I believe you will, we'll have many opportunities of talking over those happy days of our youth— Your old friend Le Blumel." When did you want to ask me to undertake?

LE BLUMEL: Well...you see...it's like this...I...

LAMBRUCHE: What? Out with it.

LE BLUMEL (*protesting*): But I...

LAMBRUCHE: I'll do anything to oblige you. Go on!

LE BLUMEL (*very embarrassed*): That is to say... firstly it a was plan...a vague plan...about a situation.

LAMBRUCHE: For me?

LE BLUMEL: Of course.

LAMBRUCHE: Good! Here with you?

LE BLUMEL (*quickly*): No.

LAMBRUCHE (*surprised*): No?

Le Blumel : Not here, at the Ministry... I supervise several departments there...so I thought perhaps if a vacancy presented itself, I might offer you.. ask you to take a position which . er... would suit you. It would be better than making copies. At the moment, I have no vacancy, but if some day, soon perhaps, you understand...the least I can do is to offer it to an old friend.

(*A pause*)

Lambruche : Was that it ?

Le Blumel : What ?

Lambruche : That was what you wanted me to undertake ?

Le Blumel (*quickly*) : The suggestion doesn't attract you ? Of course, if I could offer you anything else...

Lambruche : You're sure you have nothing else to offer me ?

(*A pause*)

Le Blumel (*very embarrassed*) : Well I...

Lambruche (*gravely*) : It's funny that you should have written this letter, marked urgent...I thought that...

Le Blumel : What did you think ?

Lambruche : Well...you said we could talk over the happy days of our youth... I thought you wanted me here with you...so when you spoke about your son needing direction, just now, I imagined...

Le Blumel (*interrupting*) : He is still very young....

LAMBRUCHE : Yes. But it is my profession to teach the young. Think what it would have meant to me! A dream come true! After the hell of a life I've had, I could have found quiet and comfort and material security in this house. It would have made my poor little wife so happy. She has been through so much. If you had entrusted your boy to me, I would have risen to the occasion... Your confidence would not have been misplaced. I never brag but I know myself...although I've fallen pretty low, I am still strong enough to rise again...given the opportunity, all my good qualities would have come out again... (*A pause. The two men look at each other.* LE BLUMEL *is painfully embarrassed.*) Ah, well, what's the use of talking about it? (*A pause*). That's my weakness, talking, just talking and you have no end of things to do....

LE BLUMEL : No...I...

LAMBRUCHE : I don't want to be a nuisance. I'd better say good-bye.

LE BLUMEL : We shall soon meet again.

LAMBRUCHE (*very solemnly*) : Do you really think that we will ever meet each other again?

LE BLUMEL : Of course, we will! I have proved that to you haven't I? I wrote to you. Seeing you again has been delightful and...er...just like old times.

LAMBRUCHE : Has it?

LE BLUMEL : Didn't you think so?

LAMBRUCHE : No, I'm afraid I didn't. When I first came in, I thought you were pleased to see

me. Then while we were talking, something crept in between us. It was hostile. I felt you disliking me.

LE BLUMEL (*protesting*) : Nonsense.

LAMBRUCHE (*animatedly*) : No ! No ! It's not nonsense. It has happened before. I talk too frankly and I say things I ought not to say...People don't like the truth...they prefer to be flattered.

LE BLUMEL : Believe me...I...

LAMBRUCHE : I am made like that. I can't lie... I hate servility...(*With melancholy*) It has done me a lot of harm. I ought to learn to be more careful. My poor little wife has often warned me. You see, when you have struggled and suffered, you're apt to blame the general order of things... People hate you for it. It discourages them and then they stop wanting to help you. (*A long silence.*) Ah well, if I have said anything that has offended you...don't think too unkindly of me.

LE BLUMEL (*sorry for him*) : My dear old fellow...

LAMBRUCHE (*growing excited*) : Besides, you and I are old friends, aren't we ? There's no need for us to bluff each other. We know the real value of things and people. Nothing is of any importance in life except trying to do one's best keeping one's head up and following one's ideals !

(*Telephone rings*)

LE BLUMEL : I beg your pardon, one second...(*He takes off the receiver.*) Hello. yes.....it's I...Under-Secretary...Le Blumel...Yes, oh, yes, indeed, Monsieur le President. You're too kind...Abso-

lutely...It shall be done. You can always count on me. I hope to have the honour of seeing you soon, Monsieur le President. (*He hangs up the receiver.*) That was our President! (*Quickly*). It's of no importance...(LAMBRUCHE *starts to go.*) Must you go?

LAMBRUCHE: As you have nothing further to say to me.

(*He goes towards the door.*)

LE BLUMEL (*suddenly*): Wait...

LAMBRUCHE: What?

LE BLUMEL: No...Nothing...(LAMBRUCHE *goes towards the door again.*) Yes...there is...I hesitated to suggest it to...but I gave you the trouble of coming here...

LAMBRUCHE: It wasn't any trouble.

LE BLUMEL. And now...after what you have told me, about your position, I mean...In the spirit in which I offer it, I would like to ask you to accept something to permit you...er...(*He puts his hand to his pocketbook.*)

LAMBRUCHE (*stopping him*): No thank you, I haven't asked you for any thing, I didn't come here for that.

LE BLUMEL: I know...But we are old friends, and ...er...I can afford it.

LAMBRUCHE (*ironically*): I don't doubt it, but I prefer not, thank you.

LE BLUMEL: Very well, (*Embarrassed he puts his pocketbook back.*) At any rate, I shall give the

suggestion I made my immediate attention. I will try and find a position for you.

LAMBRUCHE (*detached*) : That would be very kind of you. (*He goes towards the door then stops.*) But on one condition...

LE BLUMEL (*surprised*) : What condition ?

LAMBRUCHE : That if ever I can be of service to you. I don't mean financially...there are other things in the world than money ! If you ever want the chance of expressing your real self !...Of aspiring to noble work ! Promise to come and see us at the Review. We will find a place for you, a little place or possibly a big one. The man who wrote "The Sonorous Waves" will never be turned away from our door. We would welcome him as a prodigal son.

LE BLUMEL (*stiffly*) : It's more than kind of you.

LAMBRUCHE : Not at all, I mean it. (*Exit.*)

LE BLUMEL (*exasperated, walks up and down, rings bell.* DAUTIER *enters*) : There you are, Dautier, at last ! I've been waiting for you. Come along. I want to do some work. Did you get the data for my speech ?

DAUTIER : I did, sir.

LE BLUMEL : By the way, the person who has just left me...

DAUTIER : Your friend, Monsieur Lambruche, the new tutor.

LE BLUMEL (*bursting*) : Tutor ? There isn't any new tutor. There's not going to be any.

DAUTIER : I am sorry, sir. I thought you intended to arrange things with him.

LE BLUMEL : Well, I didn't arrange things with him ! We need not tell my wife that he has been here. I wanted to say this : if he comes back...he might...either here or to the Ministry...

DAUTIER : I will send him away sir ?

LE BLUMEL : No, no, I didn't say that. You will receive him on my behalf. You will ask him what he wants and you will tell me afterwards, but you will not disturb me, do you understand ? Under no pretext whatsoever. (*A long silence.*) You were quite right in what you said just now about old friends...

CURTAIN

EUGENE G. O'NEILL

ILE

A Play

CHARACTERS

BEN (*the cabin boy*)

THE STEWARD

CAPTAIN KEENEY

SLOCUM (*second mate*)

MRS. KEENEY

JOE (*a harpooner*)

Members of the crew of the Atlantic Queen

ILE

[SCENE: *Captain Keeney's cabin on board the steam whaling ship Atlantic Queen—a small, square compartment about eight feet high with a skylight in the centre looking out on the poop deck. On the left (the stern of the ship) a long bench with rough cushions is built in against the wall. In front of the bench of a table, over the bench, several curtained port-holes.*

In the rear left, a door leading to the captain's sleeping quarters. To the right of the door a small organ, looking as if it were brand new, is placed against the wall.

On the right, to the rear, a marble-topped side-board. On the side-board, a woman's sewing basket. Farther forward, a doorway leading to the companionway, and past the officers' quarters to the main deck.

In the centre of the room, a stove. From the middle of the ceiling a hanging lamp is suspended. The walls of the cabin are painted white.

There is no rolling of the ship, and the light which comes through the sky-light is sickly and faint, indicating one of those gray days of calm when ocean and sky are alike dead. The silence is unbroken except for the measured tread of

some one walking up and down on the poop deck over head.

It is nearing two bells--one o'clock—in the afternoon of a day in the year 1895.

* * * *

At the rise of the curtain there is a moment of intense silence. Then the Steward enters and commences to clear the table of the few dishes which still remain on it after the Captain's dinner. He is an old, grizzled man dressed in dungaree pants, a sweater, and a woollen cap with ear flaps. His manner is sullen and angry. He stops stacking up the plates and casts a quick glance upward at the skylight; then tiptoes over to the closed door in rear and listens with his ear pressed to the crack. What he hears makes his face darken and he mutters a furious curse. There is a noise from the doorway on the right and he darts back to the table.

Ben enters. He is an over-grown gawky boy with a long, pinched face. He is dressed in sweater, fur cap, etc. His teeth are chattering with the cold and he hurries to the stove where he stands for a moment shivering, blowing on his hands, slapping them against his sides, on the verge of crying.]

THE STEWARD (*in relieved tones—seeing who it is*). Oh, 'tis you, is it? What're ye shiverin' about? Stay by the stove where ye belong and ye'll find no need of chatterin'.

BEN: It's c-c-cold, (*Trying to control his chatter-*

ing teeth—derisively.) Who d'ye think it were—the Old Man?

THE STEWARD (*makes a threatening move—Ben shrinks away*): None o' your lip, young un, or I'll learn ye. (*More kindly.*) Where was it ye've been all o'the time--the fo'c's'tle?

BEN: Yes.

THE STEWARD: Let the Old Man see ye up for'ard monkeyshinin' with the hands and ye'll get a hidin' ye'll not forget in a hurry.

BEN: Aw, he don't see nothin'. (*A trace of awe in his tones—he glances upward.*) He jest walks up and down like he didn't notice nobody—and stares at the ice to the no'the'ard.

THE STEWARD (*the same tone of awe creeping into his voice*): He's always starin' at the ice (*In a sudden rage, shaking his fist at the skylight.*) Ice, ice, ice! Damn him and damn the ice! Holdin' us in for nigh on a year—nothin' to see but ice—stuck in it like a fly in molasses!

BEN (*apprehensively*): Ssshh! He'll hear ye.

THE STEWARD (*raging*): Aye, damn, and damn the Arctic seas and damn this rotten whalin' ship of his, and damn me for a fool to ever ship on it! (*Subsiding as if realizing the uselessness of this outburst—shaking his head—slowly with deep conviction.*) He's a hard man—as hard a man as ever sailed the seas.

BEN (*solemnly*): Aye.

THE STEWARD: The two years we all signed up for are done this day! Two years o' this dog's life,

and no luck in the fishin', and the hands half starved with the food runnin' low, rotten as it is; and not a sign of him turnin' back for home! (*Bitterly.*) Home! I begin to doubt if ever I'll set foot on land again. (*Excitedly.*) What is it he thinks he's goin' to do? Keep us all up here after our time is worked out till the last man of us is starved to death or frozen? We've grub enough hardly to last out the voyage back if we started now. What are the men goin' to do 'bout it? Did ye hear any talk in the fo'c's'tle?

BEN (*going over to him—in a half whisper*): They said if he don't put back south for home to-day they're goin' to mutiny.

THE STEWARD (*with grim satisfaction*): Mutiny? Aye, 'tis the only thing they can do; and serve him right after the manner he's treated them—'s if they weren't no better nor dogs.

BEN: The ice is all broke up to s'uth'ard. They's clear water s'far 's you can see. He ain't got no excuse for not turnin' back for home, the men says.

THE STEWARD (*bitterly*): He won't look nowheres but no'the'ard where they's only the ice to see. He don't want to see no clear water. All he thinks on is gettin' the ile—'s if it was our fault he ain't had good luck with the whales. (*Shaking his head.*) I think the man's mighty nigh losin' his senses.

BEN (*awed*): D'you really think he's crazy?

THE STEWARD: Aye, it's the punishment o' God on

him. Did ye ever hear of a man who wasn't crazy do the things he does? (*Pointing to the door in rear.*) Who but a man that's mad would take his woman—and as sweet a woman as ever was—on a rotten whalin' ship to the Arctic seas to be locked in by the ice for nigh on a year, and maybe lose her senses forever—for it's sure she'll never be the same again.

BEN (*sadly*): She useter be awful nice to me before—(*His eyes grow wide and frightened.*) She got—like she is.

THE STEWARD: Aye, she was good to all of us. 'Twould have been hell on board without her; for he's a hard man—a hard, hard man—a driver if there ever was one. (*With a grim laugh.*) I hope he's satisfied now—drivin' her on till she's near lost her mind. And who could blame her? 'Tis a God's wonder we're not a ship full of crazed people—with the ice all the time, and the quiet so thick you're afraid to hear your own voice.

BEN (*with a frightened glance toward the door on right.*): She don't never speak to me no more—jest looks at me 's if she didn't know me.

THE STEWARD: She don't know no one—but him. She talks to him—when she does talk—right enough.

BEN: She does nothin' all day long now but sit and sew—and then she cries to herself without makin' no noise. I've seen her.

THE STEWARD: Aye, I could hear her through the door a while back.

BEN (*tiptoes over to the door and listens*): She's cryin' now.

THE STEWARD (*furiously—shaking his fist*): God send his soul to hell for the devil he is!

[*There is the noise of some one coming slowly down the companionway stairs. The Steward hurries to his stacked-up-dishes. He is so nervous from fright that he knocks off the top one which falls and breaks on the floor. He stands aghast, trembling with dread. Ben in violently rubbing off the organ with a piece of cloth which he has snatched from his pocket. Captain Keeney appears in the doorway on right and comes into the cabin, removing his fur cap as he does so He is a man of about forty, around five-ten in height but looking much shorter on account of the enormous proportions of his shoulders and chest. His face is massive and deeply lined, with gray-blue eyes of a bleak hardness, and a tightly-clenched, thin-lipped mouth. His thick hair is long and gray. He is dressed in a heavy blue jacket and blue pants stuffed into his sea-boots. He is followed into the cabin by the Second Mate, a rangy six footer with a lean weather-beaten face. The Mate is dressed about the same as the captain. He is a man of thirty or so.*]

KEENEY *comes toward The Steward with a stern look on his face. The Steward is visibly frightened and the stack of dishes rattles in his trembling hands. Keeney draws back his fist and The*

Steward shrinks away. The fist is gradually lowered and Keeney speaks slowly.]

'Twould be like hitting a worm. It is nigh on two bells, Mr. Steward, and this truck not cleared yet.

THE STEWARD (*stammering*): Y-y-yes, sir.

KEENEY: Instead of doin' your rightful work ye've been below here gossipin' old women's talk with that boy. (*To Ben, fiercely.*) Get out o' this you! Clean up the chart room. (*Ben darts past the Mate to the open doorway.*) Pick up that dish, Mr. Steward!

THE STEWARD (*doing so with difficulty*): Yes, sir.

KEENEY: The next dish you break, Mr. Steward, you take a bath in the Behring Sea at the end of a rope.

THE STEWARD (*trembling*): Yes, sir.

[*He hurries out. The Second Mate walks slowly over to the Captain.*]

MATE: I warn't 'specially anxious the man at the wheel should catch what I wanted to say to you, sir. That's why I asked you to come below.

KEENEY (*impatiently*): Speak your say, Mr. Slocum.

MATE (*unconsciously lowering his voice*): I'm afeared there'll be trouble with the hands by the look o' things. They'll likely turn ugly, every blessed one o' them, if you don't put back. The two years they signed up for is up today.

KEENEY: And d'you think you're tell-in' me something new, Mr. Slocum? I've felt it in the air

this long time past. D'you think I've not seen their ugly looks and the grudgin' way they worked?

[*The door in rear is opened and Mrs. Keeney stands in the doorway. She is a slight, sweet-faced little woman, primly dressed in black. Her eyes are red from weeping and her face drawn and pale. She takes in the cabin with a frightened glance and stands as if fixed to the spot by some nameless dread, clasping and unclasping her hands nervously. The two men turn and look at her.*]

KEENEY (*with rough tenderness*): Well, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY (*as if awakening from a dream*): David, I—

[*She is silent. The Mate starts for the doorway.*]

KEENEY (*turning to him—sharply*): Wait!

MATE: Yes, sir.

KEENEY: D'you want anything, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY (*after a pause during which she seems to be endeavouring to collect her thoughts*): I thought maybe—I'd go up on deck, David, to get a breath of fresh air.

[*She stands humbly awaiting his permission. He and The Mate exchange a significant glance.*]

KEENEY: It's too cold, Annie. You'd best stay below. There's nothing to look at on deck—but ice.

MRS. KEENEY (*monotonously*): I know—ice, ice, ice! But there's nothing to see down here but these walls.

[*She makes a gesture of loathing.*]

KEENEY: You can play the organ, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY (*dully*): I hate the organ. It puts me in mind of home.

KEENEY (*a touch of resentment in his voice*): I got it jest for you!

MRS. KEENEY (*dully*): I know. (*She turns away from them and walks slowly to the bench on left. She lifts up one of the curtains and looks through a porthole; then utters an exclamation of joy.*) Ah, water! Clear water! As far as I can see! How good it looks after all these months of ice! (*She turns round to them, her face transfigured with joy.*) Ah, now I must go up on deck and look at it, David!

KEENEY (*frowning*): Best not to-day, Annie. Best wait for a day when the sun shines.

MRS. KEENEY (*desperately*): But the sun never shines in this terrible place.

KEENEY (*a tone of command in his voice*): Best not to-day, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY (*crumbling before this command—abjectly*): Very well, David.

[*She stands there, staring straight before her as if in a daze.—The two men look at her uneasily.*]

KEENEY (*sharply*): Annie!

MRS. KEENEY (*dully*): Yes, David.

KEENEY: Me and Mr. Slocum has business to talk about—ship's business.

MRS. KEENEY: Very well, David.

[*She goes slowly out, rear, and leaves the door three-quarters shut behind her.*]

KEENEY: Best not have her on deck if they's goin' to be any trouble.

MATE: Yes, sir.

KEENEY: And trouble they's going to be. I feel it in my bones. (*Takes a revolver from the pocket of his coat and examines it.*) Got your'n ?

MATE: Yes, sir.

KEENEY: Not that we'll have to use 'em—not if I know their breed of dog—jest to frighten 'em up a bit. (*Grimly.*) I ain't never been forced to use one yit; and trouble I've had by land and by sea s'long as I kin remember, and will have till my dyin' day, I reckon.

MATE (*hesitatingly*): Then you ain't goin'—to turn back ?

KEENEY: Turn back! Mr. Slocum, did you ever hear o' me pointin' s'uth for home with only a measly four hundred barrel of ile in the hold ?

MATE (*hastily*): But the grub's gittin' low.

KEENEY: They's enough to last a long time yit, if they're careful with it; and they's plenty of water.

MATE: They say it's not fit to eat—what's left; and the two years they signed on fur is up to-day. They might make trouble for you in the courts when we git home.

KEENEY: Let them make what law trouble they kin! I don't give a damn 'bout the money. I've got to git the ile! (*Glancing sharply at the Mate.*) You ain't turnin' no sea lawyer, be you, Mr. Slocum ?

MARE (*flushing*): Not by a hell of a sight, sir.

KEENEY: What do the fools want to go home fur now? Their share o' the four hundred barrel wouldn't keep them in chewin' terbacco.

MATE (*slowly*): They wants to git back to their old folks an' things, I s'pose.

KEENEY (*looking at him searchingly*): 'N you want to turn back too. (*The Mate looks down confusedly before his sharp gaze.*) Don't lie, Mr. Slocum. It's writ down plain in your eyes. (*With grim sarcasm.*) I hope, Mr. Slocum, you ain't agoin' to jine the men agin me.

MATE (*indignantly*): That ain't fair, sir, to say sich things.

KEENEY (*with satisfaction*): I warn't much afeard o' that, Tom. You been with me nigh on ten year and I've learned ye whalin'. No man kin say I ain't a good master, if I be a hard one.

MATE: I warn't thinkin' of myself, sir—'bout turnin' home, I mean. (*Desperately.*) But Mrs. Keeney, sir—seems like she ain't jest satisfied up here, ailin' like—what with the cold an' bad luck an' the ice an' all.

KEENEY (*his face clouding—rebukingly, but not severely*): That's may business, Mr. Slocum. I'll thank you to steer a clear course o' that. (*A pause.*) The ice'll break up soon to no'the'ard. I could see it startin' to-day. And when it goes and we git some sun Annie'll pick up. (*Another pause—then he bursts forth.*) It ain't the damned money what's keepin' me up in the Northern seas, Tom. But I can't go back to Homeport with a measly

four hundred barrel of ile. I'd die fust. I ain't never come back home in all my days without a full ship. Ain't that true?

MATE: Yes, sir; but this voyage you been ice-bound an'—

KEENEY (*scornfully*): And d'you s'pose any of 'em would believe that—any o' them skippers I've beaten voyage after voyage? Can't you hear 'em laughin' and sneerin'—Tibbots n' Marris n' Simms and the rest—and all o' Homeport makin' fun o' me? "Dave Keeney, what boasts he's the best whalin' skipper out o' Homeport, comin' back with a measly four hundred barrel of ile!" (*The thought of this drives him into a frenzy and he smashes his fist down on the marble top of the side-board.*) I got to git the ile, I tell you! How could I figger on this ice? It's never been so bad before in the thirty year I been acomin' here. And now it's breakin' up. In a couple o' days it'll be all gone. And they's whale here, plenty of 'em. I know they is and I ain't never gone wrong yit. I got to git the ile! I got to git it in spite of all hell, and by God, I ain't agoin' home till I do git it!

[*There is the sound of subbued sobbing from the door in rear. The two men stand silent for a moment, listening. Then Keeney goes over to the door and looks in. He hesitates for a moment as if he were going to enter—then closes the door softly. Joe, the harpooner, an enormous six-footer with a battered, ugly face, enters from*

right and stands waiting for the Captain to notice him]

KEENEY (*turning and seeing him*): Don't be standin' there like a hawk, Harpooner. Speak up!

JOE (*confusedly*): We want—the men, sir—they wants to send a depitation aft to have a word with you.

KEENEY (*furiously*): Tell 'em to go to—(*Checks himself and continues grimly.*) Tell 'em to come. I'll see 'em.

[*He goes out.*]

KEENEY (*with a grim smile*): Here it comes, the trouble you spoke of, Mr. Slocum, and we'll make short shift of it. It's better to crush such things at the start than let them make headway.

MATE (*worriedly*): Shall I wake up the First and Fourth, sir? We might need their help.

KEENEY: No, let them sleep. I'm well able to handle this alone, Mr. Slocum.

[*There is the shuffling of footsteps from outside and five of the crew crowd into the cabin, led by Joe. All are dressed alike—sweaters, sea boots, etc. They glance uneasily at the Captain, twirling their fur caps in their hands.*]

KEENEY (*after a pause*): Well? Who's to speak fur ye?

JOE (*stepping forward with an air of bravado*): I be.

KEENEY (*eyeing him up and down coldly*): So you be. Then speak your say and be quick about it.

JOE (*trying not to wilt before the Captain's glance

and avoiding his eyes): The time we signed up for is done to-day.

KEENEY *(icily)*: You're tellin' me nothin' I don't know.

JOE: You ain't p'intin' fur home yit, far s'we kin see.

KEENEY: No, and I ain't agoin' to till this ship is full of ile.

JOE: You can't go no further no'the with the ice before ye.

KEENEY: The ice is breaking up.

JOE *(after a slight pause, during which the others mumble angrily to one another)*: The grub we're gittin' now is rotten.

KEENEY: It's good enough fur ye. Better men than ye are have eaten worse.

[*There is a chorus of angry exclamations from the crowd.*]

JOE *(encouraged by this support)*: We ain't agoin' to work no more less you puts back for home.

KEENEY *(fiercely)*: You ain't, ain't you?

JOE: No; and the law courts'll say we was right.

KEENEY: To hell with your law courts! We're at sea now and I'm the law on this ship! *(Edging up toward the harpooner.)* And every mother's son of you what don't obey orders goes in irons.

[*There are more angry exclamations from the crew. Mrs. Keeney appears in the doorway in rear and looks on with startled eyes. None of the men notice her.*]

JOE (*with bravado*): Then we're agoin' to mutiny and take the old hooker home ourselves. Ain't we, boys?

[*As he turns his head to look at the others, Keeney's fist shoots out to the side of his jaw. Joe goes down in a heap and lies there. Mrs. Keeney gives a shriek and hides her face in her hands. The men pull out their sheath knives and start a rush, but stop when they find themselves confronted by the revolver of Keeney and the Mate.*]

KEENEY (*his eyes and voice snapping*): Hold still! (*The men stand huddled together in a sullen silence. Keeney's voice is full of mockery.*) You's found out it ain't safe to mutiny on this ship, ain't you? And now git for'ard where ye belong, and—(*He gives Joe's body a contemptuous kick*) drag him with you. And remember, the first man of ye I see shirkin' I'll shoot dead as sure as there's a sea under us, and you can tell the rest the same. Git for'ard now! Quick! (*The men leave in cowed silence, carrying Joe with them. Keeney turns to the Mate with a short laugh and puts his revolver back in his pocket.*) Best get up on deck, Mr. Slocum, and see to it they don't try none of their skulkin' tricks. We'll have to keep an eye peeled from now on. I know 'em.

MATE: Yes, sir.

[*He goes out, right. Keeney hears his wife's hysterical weeping and turns around in surprise—then walks slowly to her side.*]

KEENEY (*putting an arm around her shoulder—with gruff tenderness*): There, there, Annie. Don't be feared. It's all past and gone.

MRS. KEENEY (*shrinking away from him*): Oh, I can't bear it! I can't bear it any longer!

KEENEY (*gently*): Can't bear what, Annie?

MRS. KEENEY (*hysterically*): All this horrible brutality, and these brutes of men and this terrible ship, and this prison cell of a room, and the ice all around, and the silence.

[*After this outburst she calms down and wipes her eyes with her handkerchief.*]

KEENEY (*after a pause during which he looks down at her with a puzzled frown*): Remember, I warn't handkerin' to have you come on this voyage, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY: I wanted to be with you, David, don't you see? I didn't want to wait back there in the house all alone as I've been doing these last six years since we were married—waiting, and watching, and fearing—with nothing to keep my mind occupied--not able to go back teaching school on account of being Dave Keeney's wife I used to dream of sailing on the great, wide, glorious ocean. I wanted to be by your side in the danger and vigorous life of it all. I wanted to see you the hero they make you out to be in Homeport. And instead (*her voice grows tremulous*) all I find is ice and cold—and brutality! (*Her voice breaks.*)

KEENEY: I warned you what it'd be Annie. "Whalin' ain't no ladies' tea party", I says to you "and you better stay to home where you've got all

your woman's comforts." (*Shaking his head.*) But you was so set on it.

MRS. KEENEY (*wearily*): Oh, I know it isn't your fault, David. You see, I didn't believe you. I guess I was dreaming about the old Vikings in the story books and I thought you were one of them.

KEENEY (*protestingly*): I done my best to make it as cozy and comfortable as could be. (*Mrs. Keeney looks around her in wild scorn.*) I even sent to the city for that organ for ye, thinkin' it might be soothin' to ye to be playin' it times when they was calms and things was dull like.

MRS. KEENEY (*wearily*): Yes, you were very kind, David. I know that. (*She goes to left and lifts the curtains from the porthole and looks out—then suddenly bursts forth*). I won't stand it—I can't stand it—pent up by these walls like a prisoner. (*She runs over to him and throws her arms around him, weeping. He puts his arm protectingly over her shoulders.*) Take me away from here, David! If I don't get away from here, out of this terrible ship, I'll go mad! Take me home, David! I can't think any more. I feel as if the cold and the silence were crushing down on my brain. I'm afraid. Take me home!

KEENEY (*holds her at arm's length and looks at her face anxiously*): Best go to bed, Annie. You ain't yourself. You got fever. Your eyes look so strange like. I ain't never seen you look this way before.

MRS. KEENEY (*laughing hysterically*): : It's the ice

and the cold and the silence—they'd make any one look strange.

KEENEY (*soothingly*): In a month or two, with good luck, three at the most, I'll have her filled with ile and then we'll give her everything she'll stand and p'int for home.

MRS. KEENEY: But we can't wait for that—I can't wait. I want to get home. And the men won't wait. They want to get home. It's cruel, it's brutal for you to keep them. You must sail back. You've got no excuse. There's clear water to the south now. If you've a heart at all you've got to turn back.

KEENEY (*harshly*): I can't, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY: Why can't you?

KEENEY: A woman couldn't rightly understand my reason.

MRS. KEENEY (*wildly*): Because it's a stubborn reason. Oh, I heard you talking with the second mate. You're afraid the other captains will sneer at you because you didn't come back with a full ship. You want to live up to your silly reputation even if you do have to beat and starve men and drive me mad to do it.

KEENEY (*his jaw set stubbornly*): It ain't that, Annie. Them skippers would never dare sneer to my face. It ain't so much what any one'd say—but—(*He hesitates, struggling to express his meaning*) you see—I've always done it since my first voyage as skipper. I always come back—with a full ship—and—it don't seem right not to—somehow. I

been always first whallin' skipper out o' Homeport and—don't you see my meanin', Annie? (*He glances at her. She is not looking at him, but staring dully in front of her, hearing a word he is saying.*) Annie! (*She comes to herself with a start.*) Best turn in, Annie, there's a good woman. You ain't well.

MRS. KEENEY (*resisting his attempts to guide her to the door in rear*): David! Won't you please turn back?

KEENEY (*gently*): I can't, Annie—not yet awhile. You don't see my meanin'. I got to git the ile.

MRS. KEENEY: It'd be different if you needed the money, but you don't. You've got more than plenty.

KEENEY (*impatiently*): It ain't the money I'm thinkin' of. D'you think I'm as mean as that?

MRS. KEENEY (*dully*): No—I don't know—I can't understand. (*Intensely*) Oh, I want to be home in the old house once more, and see my own kitchen again, and hear a woman's voice talking to me and be able to talk to her. Two years! It seems so long ago—as if I'd been dead and could never go back.

KEENEY (*worried by her strange tone and the far-away look in her eyes*): Best go to bed, Annie. You ain't well.

MRS. KEENEY (*not appearing to hear him*): I used to be lonely when you were away. I used to think Homeport was a stupid, monotonous place. Then I used to go down on the beach, especially when it

was windy and the breakers were rolling in, and I'd dream of the fine, free life you must be leading. *(She gives a laugh which is half a sob.)* I used to love the sea then. *(She pauses; then continues with slow intensity.)* But now—I don't ever want to see the sea again.

KEENEY *(thinking to humour her)*: 'Tis no fit place for a woman, that's sure. I was a fool to bring ye.

MRS. KEENEY *(after a pause—passing her hand over her eyes with a gesture of pathetic weariness)*: How long would it take us to reach home—if we started now?

KEENEY *(frowning)*: 'Bout two months, I reckon, Annie, with fair luck.

MRS. KEENEY *(counts on her fingers—then murmurs with a rapt smile)*: That would be August, the latter part of August, wouldn't it? It was on the twenty-fifth of August we were married, David, wasn't it?

KEENEY *(trying to conceal the fact that her memories have moved him—gruffly)*: Don't *you* remember?

MRS. KEENEY *(vaguely—again passes her hand over her eyes)*: My memory is leaving me—up here in the ice. It was so long ago. *(A pause—then she smiles dreamily)* It's June now. The lilacs will be all in bloom in the front yard—and the climbing roses on the trellis to the side of the house—they're budding.—

[*She suddenly covers he face with her hands and commences to sob.*]

KEENEY (*disturbed*) : Go in and rest, Annie. You're all worn out cryin' over what can't be helped.

MRS. KEENEY (*suddenly throwing her arms around his neck and clinging to him*) :You love me, don't you, David ?

KEENEY (*in amazed embarrassment at this outburst*) : Love you ? Why d'you ask me such a question, Annie ?

MRS. KEENEY (*shaking him fiercely*) : But you do, don't you, David ? Tell me !

KEENEY : I'm your huband, Annie, and you're my wife. Could there be aught but love between us after all these years ?

MRS. KEENEY (*shaking him again—still more fiercely*) : Then you do love me. Say it

KEENEY (*simply*) : I do, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY (*gives a sigh of relief—her hands drop to her sides. Keeney regards her anxiously. She passes her hand across her eyes and murmurs half to herself*) : I sometimes think if we could only have had a child—(*Keeney turns away from her, deeply moved. She grabs his arm and turns him around to face her—intensely.*) And I've always been a good wife to you, haven't I, David ?

KEENEY (*his voice betraying his emotion*) : No man has ever had a better, Annie.

MRS. KEENEY : And I've never asked for much from you, have I, David ? Have I ?

KEENEY : You know you could have all I got the power to give ye, Annie.

MRS KEENEY (*wildly*): Then do this, this once, for my sake, for God's sake—take me home! It's killing me, this life—the brutality and cold and horror o' it. I'm going mad. I can feel the threat in the air. I can't bear the silence threatening me—day after gray day and every day the same. I can't bear it. (*Sobbing*) I'll go mad, I know I will. Take me home, David, if you love me as you say. I'm afraid. For the love of God, take me home!

[*She throws her arms around him, weeping against his shoulder. His face betrays the tremendous struggle going on within him. He holds her out at arm's length, his expression softening. For a moment his shoulders sag, he becomes old, his iron spirit weakens as he looks at her tear-stained face.*]

KEENEY (*dragging out the words with an effort*): I'll do it, Annie—for your sake—if you say it's needful for ye.

MRS. KEENEY (*with wild joy—kissing him*): God bless you for that, David!

[*He turns away from her silently and walks toward the companionway. Just at that moment there is a clatter of footsteps on the stairs and the Second Mate enters the cabin.*]

MATE (*excitedly*): The ice is breakin' up to no'-the'ard, sir. There's a clear passage through the floe, an' clear water beyond, the lookout says.

[*Keeney straightens himself like a man coming out of a trance. Mrs. Keeney looks at the Mate with terrified eyes.*]

KEENEY (*dazedly—trying to collect his thoughts*): A clear passage? To no'the'ard?

MATE: Yes, sir.

KEENEY (*his voice suddenly grim with determination*): Then get her ready and we'll drive her through.

MATE: Aye, aye, sir.

MRS. KEENEY (*appealingly*): David! David!

KEENEY (*not heeding her*): Will the men turn to willin' or must we drag 'em out?

MATE: They'll turn to willin' enough. You put the fear o' God into 'em, sir. They're meek as lambs.

KEENEY: Then drive 'em--both watches. (*With grim determination.*) They's whale t'other side o' this floe and we're agoin' to git 'em.

MATE: Aye, aye, sir.

[*He goes out hurriedly. A moment later there is the sound of scuffling feet from the deck outside and the Mate's voice shouting orders.*]

KEENEY (*speaking aloud to himself—derisively*): And I was agoin' home like a yaller dog!

MRS. KEENEY (*imploringly*): David!

KEENEY (*sternly*): Woman, you ain't adoin' right when you meddle in men's business and weaken 'em. You can't know my feelin's. I got to prove a man to be a good husband for ye to take pride in. I got to git the ile, I tell ye.

MRS. KEENEY (*supplicatingly*): David! Aren't you going home?

KEENEY (*ignoring this question commandingly*): You ain't well. Go and lay down a mite. (*He starts for the door.*) I got to git on deck.

[*He goes out. She cries after him in anguish, "David!" A pause. She passes her hand across her eyes—then commences to laugh hysterically and goes to the organ. She sits down and starts to play wildly an old hymn, "There is rest for the weary." Keeney re-enters from the doorway to the deck and stands looking at her angrily. He comes over and grabs her roughly by the shoulder.*]

KEENEY: Woman, what foolish mockin' is this? (*She laughs wildly and he starts back from her in alarm.*) Annie! What is it? (*She doesn't answer him. Keeney's voice trembles*) Don't you know me Annie?

[*He puts both hands on her shoulders and turns her around so that he can look into her eyes. She stares up at him with a stupid expression, a vague smile on her lips. He stumbles away from her, and she commences softly to play the organ again.*]

KEENEY (*swallowing hard—in a hoarse whisper, as if he had difficulty in speaking*): You said—you was agoin' mad—God!

[*A long wail is heard from the deck above "Ah. bl-o-o-o-ow!" A moment later the Mate's face appears through the skylight. He cannot see Mrs. Keeney.*]

MATE (*in a great excitement*): Whales, sir—a whole school of 'em—off the star-b'd quarter 'bout five miles away—big ones!

KEENEY (*galvanized into action*): Are you lowerin' the boats?

MATE: Yes, sir.

KEENEY (*with grim decision*): I'm acomin' with ye.

MATE: Aye, aye, sir. (*Jubilantly.*) You'll git the ile now right enough, sir.

[*His head is withdrawn and he can be heard shouting orders.*]

KEENEY (*turning to his wife*): Annie! Did you hear him? I'll git the ile. (*She doesn't answer or seem to know he is there. He gives a hard laugh which is almost a groan.*) I know you're foolin' me, Annie. You ain't out of your mind—(*Anxiously.*) be you? I'll git the ile now right enough—jest a little while longer, Annie—then we'll turn home'ard. I can't turn back now, you see that, don't you? I've got to git the ile. (*In sudden terror.*) Answer me! You ain't mad, be you?

[*She keeps on playing the organ, but makes no reply. The Mate's face appears again through the skylight.*]

MATE: All ready, sir.

[*Keeney turns his back on his wife and strides to the doorway, where he stands for a moment and looks back at her in anguish, fighting to control his feelings.*]

MATE: Comin', sir.

KEENEY (*his face suddenly grows hard with determination*): Aye.

[He turns abruptly and goes out. Mrs. Keeney does not appear to notice his departure. Her whole attention seems centered in the organ. She sits with half-closed eyes, her body swaying a little from side to side to the rhythm of the hymn. Her fingers move faster and faster and she is playing wildly and discordantly as the Curtain falls.]

LUCIEN CHANTEL

WHO KILLED ME ?

CHARACTERS

CHIEF OF POLICE

PIERRE BARNAVE

BOISSELIER, *first policeman*

JACQUIER, *second policeman*

MORIN

MADAME MAIRET

A YOUNG WOMAN

WHO KILLED ME?

[*The action takes place at the present time in Paris. Private office of a Chief of Police in a Parisian district. Down stage right, a small door back of the Chief of Police's desk. Left, another small door. Up stage, centre, a large double door. It is evening. A lamp is lit on the table. The remainder of the room is in the shadow. The* CHIEF *is working at his desk. A knock at the door. He lifts his head quickly as though he were expecting somebody and says: "Come in." Two* POLICEMEN *enter through the door up stage.*]

FIRST POLICEMAN (*as he enters*): About the suicide which was picked up in front of the building, sir.

CHIEF (*rising*): Oh...Well? Have you found anything out?

SECOND POLICEMAN: Nothing, sir.

CHIEF: What do you mean nothing? You know that I don't like trouble. Search him again. When a body goes down to the morgue and anything is discovered after it gets there, there's always the devil to pay. (SECOND POLICEMAN *exits by door left, back of which is the body.*) Uncover it. Where is the wound?

SECOND POLICEMAN (*from outside*): Here, sir, the right temple.

First Policeman (*explaining*): In the right temple, sir, exactly in the centre. The man didn't miss himself.

Second Policeman (*re-entering*): When he was picked up, he was still holding the revolver in his right hand. It was warm. We heard the shot distinctly, sir.

Chief: Are there any witnesses ?

First Policeman: Nobody sir. The street was deserted.

Chief: Are you sure ?

First Policeman (*indicating his colleague*): Jacquier was with me.

Chief: Who picked up the body ?

Second Policeman: Both of us, sir.

Chief: And you didn't notice anything special ?

First Policeman: No, sir. Only this. (*He holds out a paper to him.*)

Chief (*after having read it in silence*): It's rather strange. (*He reads it again aloud, standing near the lamp*) "Who killed me ?...I swear that I have killed myself of my own free will. Let no one be accused. I ask forgiveness of those whom I may have hurt and of those who will be hurt by my action." What does he mean ? Suspicious ! It hides something. (*A pause, he crosses over towards door left.*) Take the sheet off. (*One of the* Policemen *goes out and returns, the* Chief *in the entrance looks at the body.*) It's not a bad face...Rather distinguished...His clothes are well cut...

FIRST POLICEMAN : A bit frayed, sir. His blue suit is rather faded:

SECOND POLICEMAN : And his shoes are down at heel though they are good quality.

CHIEF : And fair hair which makes him look about twelve years old. It breaks one's heart. A kid, just a kid (*At a sign from him*, JACQUIER *goes out to replace the sheet and then returns.* CHIEF *closes the door.*) How old do you think he was, Boisselier ?

FIRST POLICEMAN : Twenty-five to twenty-six at most.

CHIEF : And you Jacquier ?

SECOND POLICEMAN : I agree, sir.

CHIEF : Yes, and he was somebody, that's obvious. A young intellectual, I'm certain of it. Somebody drove him to suicide. Somebody he wouldn't or couldn't denounce. I am afraid we are faced with one of those mysterious tragedies of family life. You're quite sure you saw no one about ? (*The two* POLICEMEN *shake their heads.*) Quite sure ?

SECOND POLICEMAN : Nobody, sir. We are absolutely sure.

CHIEF : Right, thanks. You can go and make your report. When Morin comes back, have the person shown in here immediately, do you understand ? ...And they are to be careful. (*Calling back the* FIRST POLICEMAN.) See here, Boisselier...

FIRST POLICEMAN : Yes, sir ?

CHIEF : Did Morin give you the name of the person whose address was found in his pocket ?

FIRST POLICEMAN (*taking out his note book*) : Yes, sir. Jeanne Mairet, sir. Here it is.

CHIEF (*taking note of the information*) : Thank you When Morin returns with the lady, have her shown in immediately. (*Noise off stage.* CHIEF *raises his head.*) What is it ?

FIRST POLICEMAN : Morin, sir.

CHIEF : Is she there ?

FIRST POLICEMAN : In the corridor, sir.

CHIEF (*quickly indicating the door left behind which is the body.*) Close that door. (*Looking round, sees that door is closed*) I thought it was open. (*A knock at the door.*) Come in.

MORIN (*as he enters through door up stage*) : The person is here, sir.

CHIEF : What is she like ? What sort of woman ?

MORIN : An old lady, sir, quite a gentlewoman. A nice house, clean little apartment. When I arrived, the person was just about to go to bed. She came with me at once, just as she was. She threw a cloak over her shoulders. She guesses that it is something about her son.

CHIEF : What's that ? Did you tell her ?

MORIN : No, sir. Certainly not, sir. But mothers guess, sir.

CHIEF : Has she a son of that age ?

MORIN : I understood so, sir.

CHIEF : Show her in. One second. My box of medicines. The armchair. I can feel that something is going to happen here which I would rather

not see It doesn't matter how hard one grows.... Show her in.

[MORIN *shows in* MADAME MAIRET *and withdraws.* *Exeunt the two* POLICEMEN *silently through the little door right. The* CHIEF *sits down at his desk again. Enter* MME MAIRET *who stands without moving in the entrance up stage. She is an old lady with white hair. Her face is drawn. She is without a hat. She has a scarf thrown carelessly over her head and is wearing a very simple cloak.*]

CHIEF : Come in, Madame. Sit down, please.

MME MAIRET (*makes an effort to speak*) : It's about my son, isn't it ?

CHIEF : Come in Madame. Sit down.

MME MAIRET (*takes a few steps forward and falls into the armchair, which the* CHIEF *indicates to her*): You have sent for me about him ?

CHIEF (*speaking in a tone of voice which he has wilfully made rough*) : No, no, Madame, not at all.

MME MAIRET : What is it then ?

CHIEF : What do you think it is because of your son ?

MME MAIRET : A presentiment! A mother, you know.

CHIEF : Apropose, what does your boy do? What is his profession ? Since you have mentioned him.

MME MAIRET : Ah, I knew it. It is about him Is he hurt ?

CHIEF : Why don't you answer me, Madame ?

MME MAIRET: He is a government employee. Not a very important post—in the Pensions Department ...He doesn't have to work very hard.

CHIEF: Well, yes, Madame, I did want to see you about your son. At least, we suppose that it is your son.

MME MAIRET (*quickly*): He's not been hurt or arrested?

CHIEF (*same tone*): Arrested, why?

MME MAIRET (*upset*): I don't know. I only said that.

CHIEF: Don't be alarmed. Tell me what he is like, please. How old is he?

MME MAIRET: He is twenty-five years old. He looks a little proud, a little haughty. He is a good-looking boy...Well dressed. Perhaps his linen is too fine for his walk of life. That will be his downfall. I have always told him so...his linen... The last time I saw him, he was wearing a blue suit. He's fair with very dark eyes. Is it he?

CHIEF: No, I don't think so, Madame. I don't believe so. Tell me, your son isn't living with you at present, is he? You live apart?

MME MAIRET: No, we live together. You're wrong. We were very close to each other. He had the sweetest, most charming way of saying "Mummie." It simply went to your heart. His father died a long time ago. I have only him... Why, one awful night, did he have to go away after a quarrel?...That's eight weeks ago.

CHIEF: He went away, did he ? Why was that ? Of his own free will ?

MME MAIRET : Yes, just like that.

CHIEF : After a quarrel ?

MME MAIRET : Family quarrels, you know. Young people always complain that we can't understand them or love them. Now, I ask you, when we have given up everything for them You see, when you reach my age, you can't give way any longer, you have your likes and dislikes. You're a little egoistical perhaps. It isn't only the young people who try to get the better of you. Old people do too, in their own way. And, of course, I am very much alone. Naturally, I am lonely sometimes, some days. Well, there are other times when I am very glad to be alone. Solitude is peaceful and it makes it easy to nurse little sorrows and thoughts...

CHIEF : That quarrel ? There were no questions of money between you, were there ?

MME MAIRET : Oh, never. Georges was absolutely disinterested. He was a good lad. He always gave me everything he earned.

CHIEF : How much was that ?

MME MAIRET : About one thousand five hundred francs a month.

CHIEF : Had you other resources ?

MME MAIRET : A little income left to me by my husband.

CHIEF : Had your son saved any money ?

MME MAIRET : Georges was too fond of fine linen. Besides, I have told you, he gave me everything.

It was I who paid the bills. He never had anything.

CHIEF: So he went away without a sou?

MME MAIRET: I don't know what you mean? I never thought about it. It's true. He went away without money.

CHIEF: Do you know if he still goes to his office?

MME MAIRET: He asked for a holiday.

CHIEF (*quickly*): Why?

MME MAIRET: He felt a little tired. He was a very sensitive child, very much alive, he had the soul of an artist, like his father.

CHIEF: Have you tried to find out what became of him?

MME MAIRET: Yes and no. It is not for a woman of my age to take the first step when her child abandons her.

CHIEF (*suddenly*): Why did he go?

MME MAIRET: I don't know. What do you mean? What are you leading to?

CHIEF (*pressing her*): Come now. I must know why he left you when he had no work and no money.

MME MAIRET: Very well, I'll tell you everything. I have already told you, but you didn't understand. My boy was ambitious He had artistic ideas. He dreamed of bringing about the (reconciliation) of mankind! Only that, if you please! To do good in the world, just think of it! Imaginings of young people with just this difference that in one generation the war has changed everything. He wanted

to go into politics. He had wrong ideas. He wanted to write the wrong kind of books. He got employment in the Pensions Department to fill in while he was waiting, he said. He was going to give it up. On that day he came home purposely to tell me that he had written those dreadful horrible things and that he was going to publish them. It meant immediate dismissal—poverty. What would have become of me? My little income and this big boy on my hands? I couldn't have made both ends meet. I wouldn't listen to him. At my age, one can't bear the thought of poverty... and misery. I was frightened and so I turned him out. Yes, I did. I turned him out and now, suddenly, I am worried. Where is my child?

CHIEF (*lowering his voice*): You must be brave, Madame, we have bad news for you. He was found just now in front of this building with a bullet in his forehead.

MME MAIRET: (*straightening up*): He is dead?

CHIEF: Through the right temple. His right hand was still holding the revolver.

MME MAIRET: He...my...He...Oh God! Oh God! (*She sinks down into the armchair. The* CHIEF *rises quickly. She sobs for some moments then groans. At last she quiets down and says in a colourless tone*). He can't have done this thing. He can't have done it. It's not true.

CHIEF (*lowers his head. A poignant silence for a moment*): Nevertheless, I must tell you this and it may be something of a comfort to you. We

found a note upon him addressed to you. It leads us to believe that there is somebody who can throw a light upon this tragedy and I am going to try and find out who it is.

MME MAIRET : Somebody ? Yes, there is somebody. There must be somebody. He can't have done this horrible thing himself. Someone killed him... Have you got the note ? (*She has risen. The* CHIEF *holds out the paper to her. She takes it quickly. Her hands tremble. She goes to the lamp stumbling.*) I can't read it. I can't see...My eyes are misty...(*She gives the paper back to the* CHIEF.)

CHIEF (*reading in a low voice standing near the lamp*) : "Who killed me ?...I swear that I have killed myself of my own free will. Let no one be accused I ask forgiveness of those whom I may have hurt and of those who will be hurt by my action."

MME MAIRET : Give it back to me. (CHIEF *does so. She again approaches the lamp, leans over it. A pause.*) It is his writing. It must be he. May I see him ? Where is he ?

CHIEF : If I can spare you...

MME MAIRET : No, no, I must.. at once...I must.

CHIEF : Right, I'll ring. They will bring the body in here.

MME MAIRET : It's frightful...(*Then in a hesitating, weak voice.*) I must tell you...I may not always have been a good mother to him. Suddenly, I can feel here...something that seems to be stifling me.

(*She sits down again and is about to speak. A gentle knock on the door up stage.*)

CHIEF: What is it?

MORIN: Morin, sir. About the suicide.

CHIEF: Come in...one moment, Madame, please.

MORIN (*enters, holding a card in his hand*): This person insists upon being seen, sir. Urgent.

MME MAIRET (*leaning forward*): Who is it?

CHIEF (*reading*): Pierre Barnave.

MME MAIRET: Barnave!

CHIEF: Who is he?

MME MAIRET: He was an intimate friend of my son's.

CHIEF: Show him in.

[*Exit* MORIN *through the same door.* CHIEF *sits at his desk again.* MORIN *shows in* PIERRE BARNAVE. *He then withdraws.* PIERRE BARNAVE *is a man about 34 years of age. Well dressed, clean shaven, horn rim spectacles, not very good looking, appears to be virile and strong.*]

MME MAIRET (*jumping up*): Barnave! My son!

[BARNAVE *suppresses a start.* CHIEF *waves to the mother to be silent.*]

CHIEF: Why have you come here?

BARNAVE (*passing his hand over his forehead*): I beg your pardon. Finding you here, Madame, in this place...Where is Georges?

CHIEF: Isn't that what you are going to tell us? Isn't that why you have come here?

BARNAVE: I?

CHIEF: You may speak in front of Madame.

BARNAVE : Then yes. I did come for him. I did come here about my friend. Where is he ?

CHIEF : It would be better if you told us all you know first.

BARNAVE : Very well then. It's quite simple. We were in a cafe, some friends, my wife and I. That large cafe a short distance from here at the corner. Suddenly, I got up. I never mix myself up with conversations that don't concern me, but a detail in the talk of some people at the next table alarmed me. They were talking about a young man who had been found in front of this police station. A kid with golden hair, they said, and I was frightened. I was frightened, I tell you. I left my friends I ran here. It's stupid of me. Where is Georges ?

CHIEF : When exactly did you last see your friend ?

BARNAVE : Five or six weeks ago.

CHIEF : Not since then ?

BARNAVE : No. I swear it.

CHIEF : You heard talk of a murder or of a suicide and you immediately thought of your friend. You will admit that's rather a strange coincidence !

BARNAVE : I admit it.

CHIEF : On such a slight pretext, what made you suddenly decide to come here ? You weren't specially worried about him this evening ?

BARNAVE (*in a low voice*) : Worried ? I have a subconscious sense that I have done him some wrong. I admit this in front of his mother. It was a sort of vague impression. Then when I overheard that chance conversation in the cafe, I suddenly

felt as if I had lost him. A cruel, hopeless remorse came over me as if I had left undone something I ought to have done for a boy I loved. All this may seem to you to be very absurd, but it's the truth and I ran here on the impulse of the moment.

CHIEF: Come now, people don't run to police stations to inquire into suicides when they have been quietly sitting in a cafe, unless they have serious reason for suspecting the truth.

BARNAVE (*with anguish*): Madame ?

MME MAIRET (*cries out as she rises*): Barnave, my son has just killed himself...A bullet in the head. He was found dead in frónt of this building.

BARNAVE (*under his breath*): He ?...

CHIEF: Your feeling of remorse was justified. It was really he.

BARNAVE (*sits down in a chair*): I beg your pardon. Georges was my friend. It hurts. (*A pause.*). Where is he ? (*Then as though worn out, to the mother.*) Oh, Madame, how I feel for you !

MME MAIRET: The Chief of Police has just told me, Pierre. My boy's body is to be brought in here. (*She sits down in her armchair again.*)

CHIEF (*after a pause*): Madame Mairet's address was found on him, also this note. (*He gives the note to* BARNAVE *who looks at it, then turns it over, obviously not understanding the context.*) Read it please.

BARNAVE (*reads quickly, then cries out*): It's not true. I know your suspicion. You think this is a blind. Nobody killed him. He did it himself.

CHIEF : What do you mean by that ?

BARNAVE : My young friend committed suicide.

CHIEF : Then why did you rush round here because you heard that one young man, out of hundreds of thousands, had killed himself ?

BARNAVE : You think that I...?

MME MAIRET (*quickly*) : Oh, you are mistaken, Monsieur. Barnave could not have adored my son more if he had been his brother.

CHIEF : We'll discuss that later. (*He calls* BOISSELIER *who enters at once.*) You will take this gentleman in there. (*He indicates door left*) We must have an identification at once. (*To* BARNAVE.) Please go with this Police Sergeant.

[*Exeunt* BARNAVE *and* BOISSELIER *left. The* CHIEF *closes the door after them*]

MME MAIRET (*making an effort*) : He's in there ? Are they going to bring him in ? Is it there ?

CHIEF (*curtly*) : No, Madame.

[*The door left opens silently and* BARNAVE *reappears. His head is bowed.* BOISSELIER *follows, shuts door and moves away.*]

MME MAIRET (*with a cry*) : My son ! (*After a silence*) Pierre ?

BARNAVE (*torn*) : He looks as though he were asleep.

MME MAIRET (*with a groan*) : My son, my son ! (*Rising.*) I want to see him. (*She starts forward to door left, the* CHIEF *stops her and gently replaces her in the armchair. He then returns to his desk.*)

BARNAVE : For the sake of this poor lady, can't you

postpone any further inquiries ? Besides, it is clearly a case of suicide.

CHIEF : We have this note.

BARNAVE : Well, that proves it.

CHIEF : It is not as simple as you think. My duty is to make sure.

BARNAVE (*in a low voice*) : You suspect a crime ?

CHIEF (*taking no notice of him*) : This note makes a childish attempt to hide the truth. There is a motive somewhere that must be found. Who forced that boy to take his life ? I am going to find that out as quickly as possible.

BARNAVE : If you question anyone, let it be me. Leave the poor lad's mother alone. (*He sits down.*)

CHIEF : Very well. This is my first point. Young Mairet, I understand, was a straightforward youth and in the ordinary way, would be incapable of such a cowardly act. He showed no tendency to insanity ? Is this correct ? (BARNAVE *shakes his head.*) He was only twenty-five ; at such an early age he must have had some powerful inducement to kill himself and to write this note. I want to know what that inducement was.

MME MAIRET : It was not I. It was not my fault. You can't blame me.

CHIEF : No, Madame. I realize that and I sympathize with you in your grief. You on your side must understand that it is my duty to make peremptory inquiries so that I can get at the truth. I must ask you to help me.

BARNAVE : Shouldn't all this be left to the corner?

CHIEF : I know my duty.

MME MAIRET : Yes, it is better to get it over now, Pierre.

BARNAVE (*to* CHIEF) : You are suspicious of me. I can see that. I will give you my explanation first.

CHIEF : Now we are getting at something.

BARNAVE : Before this happened, I hadn't seen Georges for some five or six weeks, I told you that. He wrote to me, but I didn't answer his letters. Can any of us explain why we do not answer letters ? We had a little quarrel—slight enough I thought at the time It occurred on the very day he left you, Madame. He came straight to me, his old friend and I wouldn't listen to him.

MME MAIRET (*in an undertone*) : And I wouldn't either.

BARNAVE : The fact is he made me angry and I sent him away.

MME MAIRET : So did I.

BARNAVE : It was nothing. He had often irritated me before. (*To* CHIEF.) I am a man of the world, Monsieur, and he acted like an aggressive youngster. From a practical point of view, he talked nonsense. I don't even know whose fault it was that he suddenly turned and left me, walked straight out of the house. He was as sensitive as a woman and he took offense, I suppose, that's all.

CHIEF : Are you sure ?

BARNAVE : Quite. It's true that afterwards, I felt uncomfortable about it, but never for one moment

did I suspect that such a terrible thing as this would happen.

CHIEF : Tell me what your quarrel was about.

BARNAVE : The difference in our point of view. I was cool and logical and Georges was violent and excited. I am a man with a family and heavy financial responsibilities. The boy was a dreamer.

MME MAIRET : Yes, he had hallucinations.

CHIEF : What did he ask you to do for him ?

BARNAVE : He wanted me to help him in realizing his dreams. When he arrived at my apartment, he seemed excited and depressed at the same time. I argued with him, even made fun of him. He asked me for money. A ridiculously large amount. I can't remember how much.

CHIEF : Did you know that when Monsieur Mairet called on you he hadn't a son ?

BARNAVE : No. It never crossed my mind and Georges was too proud to mention trifles.

MME MAIRET : He may have seen you sitting in the cafe and hurried past !

CHIEF : How long were you in the cafe ?

BARNAVE : Half an hour, perhaps longer. Would you like me to call my wife and friends ? They are still there.

CHIEF : No. It isn't necessary. I believe you. Where were you before that ?

BARNAVE : We went there straight from home. What possible object could I have in...

CHIEF : You say you had not seen your friend for the past five or six weeks ?

BARNAVE : Yes.

CHIEF : Not since the very day he separated from his mother ?

BARNAVE : That is so.

CHIEF : Now then. It is exactly eight weeks since Monsieus Mairet left home. So you have seen him since then, eh ?

BARNAVE : Possibly. I may have been mistaken

CHIEF : Answer me. Have you seen him since ?

BARNAVE : Once perhaps. I don't remember.

MME MAIRET : Pierre ?

CHIEF : Come now, think. I must get to the bottom of this. Where did Mairet go after he left his mother ? (*Silence.*) You surely have some idea. Had he any other friends or acquaintances to whom he could go ? (*Another silence.*) Let me be more precise, was there anyone to whom he could turn after you refused to assist him ?

MME MAIRET : Oh, no. I am certain there was nobody. (*Then after sudden embarrassment*) Nobody, I knew of...

BARNAVE (*in a low voice*) : He had a sweetheart.

MME MAIRET (*hurt*) : Oh...

CHIEF : Why didn't you tell me this at once ?

BARNAVE : I didn't think of it.

CHIEF : Do you know her ?

BARNAVE : I don't exactly know her.

CHIEF : What's her name ? Do you know where she lives ?

BARNAVE : Yes. Some time ago, he wrote to me asking me if I could get work for her. I remember

it now. (*He takes out his pocket book and selects a slip of paper which he hands to the* CHIEF.)

CHIEF (*after reading name and address*) : Not far from here. Can she be trusted ?

BARNAVE : Georges loved her—that's enough. Of course, he was young and inexperienced...

[CHIEF *presses the bell.*]

MME MAIRET (*quickly*) : What are you going to do ?

CHIEF : Pardon me, Madame. We must have all the facts. (*A knock at the door is heard.*) Come in. (*Enter* MORIN. CHIEF *hands him the paper.*) Go immediately to this address and bring the woman here. Quickly. You understand ?

MORIN : Yes, sir.

[*Exit* MORIN. CHIEF *returns to his seat. A slight pause.*]

MME MAIRET (*in a gentle voice*) : You should have told me, Pierre. Why didn't you tell me ? We might have saved him. I know I am an old woman, but I could have helped.

BARNAVE : It was not that. I had a vague suspicion that he was in love. It didn't worry me or I would have written.

MME MAIRET : Oh, why didn't you ?

BARNAVE : I was a little ashamed of myself and self-conscious too...and the days passed. My time was taken up with business life and egoism. How wrong one can be at times.

MME MAIRET : He never mentioned anything to you about killing himself ?

BARNAVE : Never.

MME MAIRET : Then why did he ? Why ?

CHIEF (*looking up from his papers*) : The facts are these. Monsieur Mairet asked you to find work for the girl. (BARNAVE *nods his head.*) You didn't ? Now what exactly was their relationship ?

BARNAVE : I believe the boy was in love with her and she with him.

MME MAIRET : Why didn't he tell me ? (*Then in a low voice.*) I would have received the girl if he really loved her. Who is she ?

BARNAVE : Some girl. A student, I believe, working for her examinations.

MME MAIRET : Is she pretty ?

BARNAVE : I don't know. I didn't trouble to find out.

MME MAIRET : Why ?

BARNAVE : He was young and it was none of my business.

CHIEF : Did Monsieur Mairet ever talk to you about his sweet-heart ?

BARNAVE : I never questioned him It was he who confided in me.

CHIEF : And on the day he went to you for help ?

BARNAVE : I cut him short by taking her address.

MME MAIRET : Pierre ! Pierre ! The girl may have been as poor as he was.

BARNAVE : Well, what of it ? That wasn't my fault. How could I interfere ?

MME MAIRET : I don't know, Pierre. After all, I am only a poor old woman. But you are a man, a friend. He asked you to save her and you sent him away empty handed. Words are like arrows, they

can kill. Did you see him after that ?

BARNAVE (*broken*) : No. I have told you I never saw him again until...(*he looks towards the door left.*)

MME MAIRET : And yet I know you loved him. You had long walks together. He told me how you used to scold him. You have known him since he was a child. You used to call him "My little Georges !"

BARNAVE (*with his head in his hands*) : Georges ! Georges !

MME MAIRET : I too. I have been in the wrong. If only we could read the faces of those we love, we would never let anger get the better of us.

BARNAVE : We can't think about others all the time In these days we haven't enough time to protect ourselves.

MME MAIRET : That's it. So we don't think of them at all. We pretend...they seem to us to be asking for the impossible when they might only be begging for some little favour which would save them from despair. Pierre, perhaps we killed my boy.

BARNAVE (*in a horse voice*) : No...It's not true, I could never have killed Georges. (*Suddenly.*) That woman ! More likely it was she who did it.

MME MAIRET : You mean she drove him to it ?

BARNAVE (*with conviction*) : She did.

MME MAIRET : Yes, yes. That woman. She had no pity. she refused him and now he is dead.

[*A soft knocking at the door up stage is heard.*]

CHIEF (*looking up from his papers*) : Who is it ?

[*Entrer* MORIN.]

MORIN : It's the young woman, sir.

MME MAIRET : She, Pierre !

CHIEF : Show her in

[*The* YOUNG WOMAN *is shown in by* MORIN *who immediately retires. She remains standing on the door still. Her eyes are frank. She is a magnificent girl, simply, almost poorly dressed. Her eyes are deep but a little cold, like those of any strong-minded person.* BARNAVE *and* MME MAIRET *appear to be non-plussed by the apparition of this young woman who is too beautiful and too perfect.* BARNAVE *offers her his chair.*]

YOUNG WOMAN (*coming forward*) : Thank you. I prefer to stand.

CHIEF : I hope you will excuse me, Madame. I have been oblidged to send for you about something very distressing.

YOUNG WOMAN : I know. Your sergeant has prepared me. Georges Mairet is dead.

CHIEF (*quickly*) : This lady is his mother and this is Monsieur Barnave, a friend of the deceased. There was only a note found upon the body. It was addressed to Madame Mairet. If you feel well enough, perhaps you will be able to throw some light upon the meaning of this mystery. Can you give us any reason why this young man was driven to take his life ?

[*The* CHIEF *holds out the note. The* YOUNG WOMAN *approaches the lamp and reads to herself*

in a low voice. She does this without displaying any emotion. Then she stiffens and obviously makes an effort. Finally she passes her hand over her eyes. Suddenly her shoulders shake. The note falls to the ground. There is a silence.]

YOUNG WOMAN (*lifting her head*) : You may question me. I will be strong. (*But her voice is trembling, she leans on the table to prevent herself from falling.*)

CHIEF : Take your time.

YOUNG WOMAN (*again stiffening*) : Question me, I will reply.

CHIEF : Forgive me my frankness, but it is necessary we should get at the truth, Monsieur Barnave has hinted at your relationship with the young man.

YOUNG WOMAN : Yes. We loved each other.

CHIEF : Now, somebody may have been present, or, at any rate, not far away when Monsieur Mairet killed himself. I even suggest that somebody may have placed the weapon in his hand Can you help us with a few precise details ? How long ago is it that you saw Monsieur Mairet for the last time ?

YOUNG WOMAN : A few hours ago. Georges had just left me.

CHIEF : Are you sure that he saw nobody after he left you ? Or at least, that he had no appointment ? In other words, was he alone ?

YOUNG WOMAN : I am certain he was.

CHIEF : Did he leave you under any stress of emotion ?

YOUNG WOMAN : No. Georges went out as usual, just as he often did at night.

CHIEF : At night ?

YOUNG WOMAN : Well, in the evening. He used to walk by himself looking straight in front of him. You see, Monsieur, life had been very hard for him lately. He was out of work and I am only a student. I am not earning any money yet.

CHIEF : Did you notice anything abnormal in his attitude ? Was his conversation at all strange ?

YOUNG WOMAN : I can't remember.

CHIEF : You must try. Monsieur Mairet had been living with you for the past few weeks ?

YOUNG WOMAN : Yes, he had no other home and no resources. What else could he do ?

BARNAVE : He accepted your generosity ?

YOUNG WOMAN : I was obliged to ask him to do so as a favour to me.

CHIEF : How did he occupy his time ?

YOUHG WOMAN : By looking for work.

CHIEF : But he was employed in a Government office. He was on leave. Why should he try to get another job ?

YOUNG WOMAN : The day after he began his holiday, he received a letter.

CHIEF : Well ?

YAUNG WOMAN : It appears he had revolutionary ideas and he was spreading propaganda in the office. The letter was from the head of his department. He was peremptorily dismissed.

MME MAIRET : That is not possible. The letter

would have been delivered to my apartment. I would have seen it.

YOUNG WOMAN : A friend had warned him about it, so he waited for your postman and intercepted the letter.

BARNAVE : Little idiot! Why didn't he write to me ?

MME MAIRET : But you never answered his letters.

BARNAVE : If only he had come to me!

YOUNG WOMAN : Crawling ? Would you have expected that of him ? Besides, you must remember, there was not much of the financial genius about him

CHIEF : We are wandering from the point. This does not explain the motive for the suicide.

YOUNG WOMAN : Very clearly. He went into the world to beg. He was turned away. Who killed him ? I will tell you—

MME MAIRET (*springing up*) : No, don't say it!

BARNAVE : I'll swear I didn't!

YOUNG WOMAN (*gently*) : I am not accusing you, Madame, (*to* BARNAVE) nor you, Monsieur. I do not accuse anyone. It is only when those we love leave us that we realize how little we have given. This evening, I let him go out when I knew he was in despair.

MME MAIRET : You let him go ?

YOUNG WOMAN : Yes, I let him go because I loved him. (*In a low voice.*) I knew that he would never come back. We had nothing left—not a penny.

MME MAIRET (*like an echo*) : Nothing left...

YOUNG WOMEN : Wait! I haven't told you everything. We hadn't had enough for weeks. Do you understand ?

MME MAIRET : Yes, you turned him out. You were frightened too ?

YOUNG WOMAN : I was.

MME MAIRET : Just like me. You were frightened of not having enough to eat or a home to sleep in. Just like me.

YOUNG WOMAN : No, not that. I have never known anything but poverty. I am used to it. But he was weak and unarmed. What would poverty have done to him—poor little boy ?

MME MAIRET (*weakly, as though in anguish*) : So... ?

YOUNG WOMAM : We were standing by the window, he was going out for his usual evening stroll. He was so brave. He laughed and said "Good-bye, my darling." We kissed each other and as he took me in his arms, I felt the revolver in his coat pocket, pressing against me. Suddenly, from behind the clouds, the moon came out. The room was filled with its soft light. Was it possible that Georges was going to die ? He couldn't go and leave the beauty of that light. I tried to say "Don't go." Just then the moon went behind the clouds again. In the window opposite, I saw poverty. It was sinister. Two emaciated human beings were sitting by the dim light of a broken lamp, staring straight in front of them. They were surrounded by their misery and by something for which there is no word in any human language.

So I said "Not that!" and I turned him out. Yes, I turned him out. So neither of you must feel in anyway guilty it was I who killed him. And now I am ready to be arrested.

CHIEF (*rising in a business like way*) : The inquiry is at the end. You are all three at liberty. You may go. The law has no power in such cases.

NOTES

NOTES

THE PROPOSAL

The Proposal: described as a jest, the expression of a Personality which is simple, humane and honest. Luckily for Chekhov, (1860—1904) he worked in a national tradition which allowed him to realize in the drama what was best in himself. No matter how personal his art may be, it drew nourishment from the great stream of nineteenth century Russian realism. Russian writers are at their best when they shake off foreign classical and romantic influences and attempt to create a national literature. The strength of this literature lies in the fact that it reveals life instead of sugar-coating or gilding it. But this realism is completely devoid of sensationalism. The well-spring of this art is humaneness. Realism in the French masters had a brain, but realism in the Russian masters had a heart. A stout heart. Note the strength and drive, the hunger for life and positiveness of Chekhov's plays. He has a lovable simplicity and sweetness of temper; the Sophoclean balance—the even tempered soul. Gorky: "In his presence everyone felt in himself a desire to be simpler, more beautiful, more oneself. All his life Chekhov lived in his own soul; he was always himself, inwardly free." Chekhov never

lost his inner optimism, his faith in man. For him there were no failures.

His universal humanity. Chekhov understood people—just ordinary people, who are neither wholly good nor wholly bad, happy nor miserable, strong nor weak, but all of these things at once. He combines a tragic sense of life with a comic sense of life. He is infinitely tender and compassionate He believes that suffering is often caused without evil intention ; it may certainly be brought about by the action of individuals, but for the most part, unwittingly. Ordinary folk are seldom patterns of virtue or monsters of vice. Galsworthy got away from the villain and hero by saying that suffering was the fault of society. Chekhov does not take this way of escape. For him the channels of evil are often innocent, even lovable. Chekhov's One-Act plays are often hilarious, The *Proposal* extracts a wealth of farcical amusement from a land owner and from the girl he has come to woo. Instead, they engage in a violent quarrel over a piece of land until the suitor makes his escape. When the girl learns that he actually came to propose to her she sends for him in haste, but again they bicker. The suitor swoons, he is revived and betrothed, and then the quarrel is resumed.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Sean O'Casey, Irish playwright, came from the slums of Dublin. He has described his boyhood

with characteristic fire in the autobiographical novel "I Knock at the Door". His meagre education by a clergyman is described in bitter words : "being lugged off along at the backside of this soft-hatted, stiff-collared, egg-headed owl, henchman of heaven, to be added to the swarm of urchins cowering and groping about in the rag-and-bone education provided by the Church and State for the children of those who hadn't the wherewithal to do any better." Prematurely out in the world and insufficiently educated, he began to knock at the door of literature with clumsy but powerful hands. A hard bread-and-butter road. In the half-industrialized seaport of Dublin where casual work was far more abundant than regular employment he moved from job to job ; dock-worker, stone-breaker, pushed from pillar to post. He was dismissed from his first real job at the age of fifteen for refusing to take off his cap while receiving his pay. Bitterness and pugnacity. His genius is a compound of anger and pity, of laughter and sorrow ; his characterization is vivid and his dialogue passionately alive. O'Casey never lets us forget the essential unity of the underdog whether he be Irish or English, Catholic or Protestant. There is a fellowship in all suffering, a reality in natural sympathy. Having himself risen from the slums, he clothes the problems of ordinary people with eloquent flesh that is closer to both reality and drama that any flurry of romantic nationalism. Note his robust characteri-

zation, humanity and biting irony. He spares his audience nothing in the sharp mingling of bitter comedy with stark tragedy. There is a sardonic ring in his laughter. His plays are not neatly constructed, but they have a terrific, almost primitive dramatic power, which puts to shame the insignificance and essential triviality of of popular drawing-room comedy.

O'Casey is an uncompromising realist who follows his own dramatic instincts, and whether he keeps the rules or not he certainly succeeds in 'putting it across.' He has done for Dublin what another Irish playwright Synge, did for the countryside. He has shown the common people in their amazing mixture of comedy and tragedy, in language at once realistic and picturesque. The secret of his success is that he writes about people, places and circumstances which are completely familiar to him. But what he gives us is not merely a photograph. In that respect he surpasses the rigidly naturalistic writers. He is naturalistic, but there is something more. Like Synge there is an appeal to the imagination and a quality in the language that approaches the effect of poetry.

A LADY IN A CAGE

This is a crime thriller full of suspense to the very end. Miss Pink, an employee of the firm of Fellowes, Moore, and Hummell, shoots Mr Fellowes down while he is in the middle a of telephone call and then quietly rings up Detective Inspector

Burgess to come over. She does not tell him what it is all about—"I wonder could you come and see Mr. Fellowes—it's a personal matter." Her office colleagues, Miss Jones and Mr. Roberts come soon after and their conversation takes a very interesting turn. The reader is excited to know how the dramatist would manage the scene of the discovery of Miss Pink's crime. There might easily be an anti-climax ; after all. the vital part of the play, the murder, has been committed at the very outset. Is there anything of dramatic value left for the denouement ? Yes, wait and see. For Miss Pink is sick not only of Mr. Fellowes ; there are his partners to reckon with, messrs Moore and Hummell, who have their office rooms in the same building. And this brings us to the real meaning of the play. It is not merely a thriller ; it is a fine study in human psychology. Why should Miss Pink, of all persons, wish to destroy the whole house of Fellowes, Moore and Hummell ?—Miss Pink, a small, prim spinster of at least forty-five, earnest, mild and quite harmless ? But as the detective says innocently with unconscious truth, "Now if there were to be a murder in this place I wouldn't pick on any of the sour battle-axes you have around here. I'd look for someone quiet and timid. Some one like you, Miss Pink."

Why does anybody turn a murderer ? And why Miss Pink ? The answer is full of pathos and tragedy, the tragedy of a wasted life. For twenty-five

years Miss Pink has been coming and going through dreary streets, twenty-five years listening to Mr. Fellowes and Mr. Moore and Mr. Hummell and the rest of them ; watching their schemes, their greedy, crafty antics, working day in, day out, in an atmosphere of intrigue and jealousy and corruption and selfishness and treachery. And now she is no longer necessary ; she is to be discarded for someone younger. The poetry has gone out of her soul as the fields and the trees have been obliterated by Mr. Moore's advertisement hoardings, and Mr. Hummell's unsightly garage. And now Mr. Fellowes's new drying plant is going up. For a whole life-time Miss Pink has been effacing herself all day and everyday before the same people, living only for a career. And now even that is to be taken away from her by her masters. Chesterton's Wicked Grocer rings mournfully in her ears :

"He keeps a lady in a cage
Most cruelly all day,
And makes her count and calls her 'Miss'
Until she fades away".

This is Miss Pink's tragedy, and the murders she commits are a creative affirmation of her lost real self—a last desperate assertion of human self-respect.

THE BOY COMES HOME

Alan Alexander Milne, who died recently, was educated at Cambridge, where he edited the student

magazine "The Granta." He worked as a free lance journalist in London, and was for many years assistant editor of the "Punch". In this capacity he gave a foretaste of his future quality by replacing criticism with a weekly series of extremely clever little dialogues in a vein of light burlesque—some of them among the best things in their kind that have been written. His plays have been outstanding in their grace, wit, good humour and clear and sound character-drawing. His poems and plays for and about children—including "When we were very Young", "Winnie-the-Pooh"—have not only become house hold words; they have contributed to the happiness of countless well-conducted homes by their genuine sympathy with the joys, fancies, and prides of childhood. "The Boy Comes Home" was produced at the Victoria Palace Theatre, London in 1918. It is written in a vein of light comedy, with a delightful easy touch and a charm which cannot be defined. It is amusing and witty throughout, as a light comedy should be, but it also expresses a profound truth. The conflict between the hero and his pompous, bullying uncle ends rightly in the victory of the former. When he returns home, Philip is no longer a child, and having experienced the War, is no longer in a mood to be overawed by the bogus severity of uncle James which passes for strength with the weak. As Aunt Emily says, Philip's four years 'out there' have made him more of a man; he doesn't seem somehow like a boy who can be told what to do. Experience is not

to be measured in years. It is intensity that matters —"That was when I became twenty-five—or thirty-five—or forty-five." The war had taught him to use force to put down force. His uncle is trying to use the force of money to make Philip do what he wants. The young man will have none of it. He will use force to stop it—and he does it effectively with a revolver! The uncle is vanquished, but he will never be quite certain whether it was a dream or a reality! The reader is kept in a state of hope and fear until the climax is reached and passed.

The treatment is dramatic, without being sensational. Ordinarily the word 'dramatic' is synonymous with 'exciting' or 'thrilling', but a drawing-room comedy such as the present one could hardly be that. Milne began to write plays to while away leisure hours when he was serving as a soldier in the first world war. Judging by his own account of the experiment, he did it for fun, just as other men went for joy-rides or played at cards. He certainly did not write because he was conscious of an urgent message, or impelled by some deep inward conflict which demanded expression. He has no craving to write about sin and sinners, men with a dark past, women with clandestine love affairs. Practically all his plays therefore are light-hearted comedies, and "The Boy Comes Home" is one of his best.

AN OLD FRIEND

Edmond See was born at Bayonne, France, in 1875. Novelist, essayist, dramatic critic

and dramatist, he was both versatile and prolific. Among his successful novels must be mentioned "Un Cousin d' Alsace", "Confidences", "Notre Amour" and "La Letter Anonyme", and among his plays "L' Indiscret" and "Saison d' Amour." "An Old Friend" [Un Ami de Jeunesse] was performed for the first time on any stage at the Come'die Francaise in 1921

The theme of the play is the gulf created by time between two friends who once loved each other and shared youthful follies, enthusiasms and ideals. One of them. Le Blumel has prospered and is now an under-secretary in a Government Ministry. He hopes to be a minister one day and is full of self-importance and worldly smugness. The poetry of his youth has almost completely faded out, leaving him a typical French official, unimaginative, ambitious, with a high opinion of himselt and a very limited imagination. He is in need of a tutor for his seven-year old son and suddenly thinks of the friend of his youth, Lambruche, who chose the harder path of a school teacher. He sends for him, fondly hoping that he will not only do a good turn to his old friend by offering him a lucrative appointment but also impress him with his own success and importance in the world. His shrewd Secretary Dautier has his doubts—"I hope you won't find your friend very changed. Eight years is a long time." But that does not worry the complacent Monsieur Le Blumel. "Good old Lambruche! I can't wait to see him! He'll be so proud of me!"

Monsieur Lambruche comes, a bit deaf and bedraggled. out of job, almost broken by life, but not quite. He has kept up some of the idealism of his youth, and has suffered for it. He married the mistress of his romantic youth (Le Blumel did not marry his ; he preferred a more respectable match !) had a son who died when he was about six ; his wife fell seriously ill. Lambruche lost his job at his school (a deaf class master was a pie for the mischievous brats) and found himself turned out on to the street without a penny in his pocket. His life during the last eight years has not exactly been respectable according to Le Blumel's standards : a delivery boy for a tailor, a singer in a cabaret at Montmartre. But he has tried to remain faithful to his ideals inspite of the difficulties of life. A poet he was born and a poet he will die.

And how has his dear friend Le Blumel fared during these eight years ? How gifted he used to be, a poet too. But what is he reduced to now ?—a mere Government official—"poor old fellow ! I pity you. What a lot of papers you must have to wade through ! And the speeches ! And the masses of people who flatter you until they have got what they want out of you ! It is a bad exchange for our lovely old times, isn't it ?—How sad it is that you have failed. My little woman said it wasn't your fault, it is just the filthly heartlessness of life's necessities which have obliged you to give in. Life got the better of you. It curshes us all...My poor old fellow !"

By this time it is clear that the two friends are not speaking the same language. Monsieur Le Blumel, a failure indeed !—a ministerial under-secretary, a possible future minister, married to the respectable madame ! What had come over his old friend Lambruche ? Clearly not a suitable tutor for his dear little son.

Better get rid of him politely. Well, says Lambruche, can I be of any service to you ? when you spoke about your son needing direction, just now, I imagined—it is my profession to teach the young, you know.

Oh, dear, thinks monsieur Le Blumel, this is too much. He does not need his old friend at all, something has crept in between them : Time. Who deserves more pity—Lambruche or Le Blumel ? There is a subtle irony in the play, the edge of a sharp blade. And pathos, too.

ILE

O' Neill : One of the most influential of American playwrights who started the *Theatre Libre* movement in 1915. It was in the Province town Theatre (converted from a stable in New York) that these zealous young writers launched a new native drama. O' Neill supplied them with several one-acters, short plays being in particular demand owing to the slim resources of the experimentalists. O' Neill reflected a general discontent with a materialistic America on the part of the younger creative writers of the age, a sense of frustration, a

hunger for enriched experience, and an assimilation of European thought and dramatic art. O' Neill responded to these stirrings with impressive though somewhat crude intensity. He brought to his task a raw, "personal passionateness" which in the estimation of some critics links him with that morning star of Shakespeare's age, Christopher Marlowe. It is true that O'Neill often excels in energy at the expense of form and has therefore been accused of being a "melodramatist". But it would be foolish to ignore his greatness because of his imperfections. His somber and sardonic tone hides a passionate honesty, his realization of the struggle between man's will and fate, between passion and circumstance, and between forces of the inner self. In his plays he successfully catches the reality of common people living on sea or land. He is both exciting and intense. There is a poetic quality in his rhetoric, a swelling music and a sense of distance and enternal recurrence. He is a master of American dialects, and has recorded (as in the Ile) the everyday speech of sailors and stokers with vigour and colour. It is true that his method of characterization is often a demonstration of ideas about character instead of individualization, and his characters are consequently symbols rather than identifiable persons. Nevertheless these characters make an insistent demand upon our attention by their intensity. O Neill has introduced a new, dynamic concept of dramatic characterization, bringing out those attributes of personality that psychoanalysis has taught

us to regard as the dynamics of character. His sense of drama comes out very effectively in the One-Act play, for he knows how to play on the nerves, alternating settings astutely, grouping characters effectively, and allowing climaxes to explode at the most theatrical moment. He is not afraid of employing unusual devices in order to externalize inner stresses. One such device is the aside which is used not merely to explain the workings of the speaker's mind, but to contradict what has been said openly a moment previously, as one might say "delighted to meet you" and think "My God. what have I done to deserve this ?" Both these would be spoken, one as ordinary stage conversation, the other aside to the audience.

O'Neill is thus important because he has something to say and a willingness to experiment with technique in order to say it in his own way.

The present play was written in 1917. It is a drama of a consuming passion or an *idee fixe* on the part of a sea captain who continues his search for whales even at the risk of a mutiny and of his wife's insanity.

WHO KILLED ME ?

Lucien Chantel, French dramatist, was born in Paris in 1887. He was a pupil at the Lycee Condorcet where he took his degree. He started his life with great ambition, some laziness and little money, and became a dramatic critic on a woman's weekly magazine. He fought in the first World War,

was invalided out, went back to fight and was invalided out again. He was now becoming progressively deaf and lived and worked in isolation on a play called *Silence*. This play was accepted unanimously by the "Readers' Committee of the Society of Authors" and was produced at the Odeon in 1925. He continued to work in silence and isolation in a little country village far from Paris and at the Grand Guignol he firmly established himself as a writer of One-Act plays, combining psychological and dramatic qualities. "Who Killed me ?" had its first performance at the Grand Guignol in the spring of 1932.

The French are in some ways far bolder than the English in their choice of themes for their plays. In the French theatre emotions, either intellectual or sentimental must be stirred if successful entertainment is to be achieved. It is consequently understandable that French dramatists choose as their main theses, for both drama and comedy, plots depending upon the varied relationships between the sexes. The One-Act play suits this purpose admirably because of its very shortness. It must develop quickly both in action and in characterization. It should establish atmospher within a few moments after the curtain has risen. The French mastery of dialogue gives additional help. Aurally, the Paris theatre is enterprising and daring, visually it is more restrained. The freedom and daring of the things the French actors say on the stage should

be compared with the restraint of the things they do.

"Who Killed me ?" is a powerful play which brings out the tragedy of human relationships poignantly. Techincally and legally we are responsible only for ourselves ; we can't think about others all the time. But humanly and spiritually we belong to each other and therefore need each other. Tragedy springs from an incomprehension of this spiritual tie. Thinking that we haven't enough time to protect ourselves we shut out other human beings from our sympathy and care. We pretend they are asking for the impossible when they might only be begging for some little favour which would save them from despair. And it is only when we lose our friends that a cruel, hopeless remorse comes over us if we had left undone something we ought to have done. If only we had listened to them and not sent them away empty handed. Words are like arrows to the sensitive, they can kill. As Madame Mairet realizes, only too late, if only we could read the faces of those we love, we would never let anger get the better of us. It is only when those we love leave us that we realize how little we have given. The answer to the question then 'who killed monsieur Mairet ?" is : legally and technically, he killed himself, but spiritually and humanly by all those who loved him—his mother, his friend and his sweetheart.

Drama
Play

~~Text~~